

*Alison
Holst's*

**MICROWAVE
MENUS #2**

BASED ON THE SECOND
T.V. SERIES

MICROWAVE MENUS



Introduction

These days, many thousands of New Zealand households are enjoying the speed, economy and convenience of microwave cooking. Unfortunately, however, quite a number of cooks do not realise the full potential of their microwave ovens, and are not using them as much as they could.

This book contains a selection of menus, carefully planned to fit in with different family situations. Each menu is made up of several recipes, all of which can be cooked in a microwave oven.

Of course you will not always want to prepare each menu exactly as I have, but seeing a complete menu can help to remind you of the different ways you can use your microwave, to help you get a meal on the table with less time, fuss and bother — and less washing up!

It is relatively easy to cook an isolated recipe, but the hardest thing for any cook to learn is how to cook several foods, and get them together on the table at the right time, to form a tasty, attractive and nutritionally well-balanced meal.

For each menu, a 'Plan of Attack' is given, telling you where to start and how to proceed, and all the recipes are included in the pages following each menu.

To help you with your food presentation, each menu has been photographed.

Most New Zealanders, when they prepare a meal, cook part of it by conventional methods, and part in their microwave oven. I usually do, too. Of course you can modify these menus, cooking some of the recipes conventionally, if you like. My intention in this book is to show that it IS possible to cook delicious and attractive complete meals in a microwave oven.

This is a book of menus, not a complete microwave manual giving you all the principles of microwave cooking. For best

results with your microwave, use this book after you have read a book explaining microwave principles, detailed instructions, and hints.

Some of the recipes used in this book are from my large *Alison Holst's New Microwave Cookbook*, some are modifications of my other recipes, and some are completely new.

The recipes and menus in this book are those used in the T.V. series, "Alison Holst's Microwave Menus Two".

Alison Holst's Microwave Menus contains menus and recipes used in the first TV series. I acknowledge the generous support of the Monaco Corporation, agents for Toshiba Microwave Ovens and Food Processors who, together with Television New Zealand, made the television series possible.

I hope you will find these menus, recipes and ideas helpful.

Good cooking!

May 1989



IMPORTANT NOTE

Cakes and baking can overcook in a short time in a microwave oven. Baking times vary. Especially if you are baking in a covered pan, lifted slightly from the floor of your oven, you may find the cooking time is shorter than that suggested.

The first time you make a recipe, start checking after two-thirds of the suggested time.

Make sure you have modified the cooking time if your oven has a wattage higher than 650 watt, and if different names are given to power levels of 30%, 50% and 70% power.

Cooking Levels and Details

The wattage of domestic microwave ovens varies from 500 watts to 700 watts.

In most microwave ovens you can choose one of several different power levels when you cook. Most of the time, you cook at Full power, that is 100% power. If you do not specify other power levels or instructions when you cook, your microwave oven will cook at this level.

The power levels on various microwave ovens are given different names.

I have used the following names for the different power levels used in the recipes in this book.

Full	100% power	650 watts
Medium-high	70% power	450 watts
Medium	50% power	350 watts
Defrost	30% power	220 watts

The percentages and wattages given are approximate only. My recipes were cooked and tested using a Toshiba E.R. 7900 A/N 650 watt microwave oven.

Your oven may have different settings. Don't worry! This may be overcome easily, either by using slightly shorter or longer cooking times, or by using your instruction book to find the corresponding settings for your microwave oven. The recipes in this book have been tested in an oven with a turntable. If you prepare these recipes in an older oven without a turntable you may have to turn the food several times during cooking, to make sure it cooks evenly.

This book, like other microwave recipe books, cannot always give you precise and accurate cooking times because these vary. Watch the food carefully as it nears the end of the cooking time, remembering that it will continue to cook after the oven is turned off.

Make a note of the time required, the dish used etc, so you have a guide the next time you use the same recipe.
When you can smell the food cooking in the microwave oven you know that it is nearly ready.

You should use Full power in microwave recipes where no power level is specified. When a particular power level is specified at the start of a recipe you should use it for the rest of the recipe, unless otherwise instructed.

Standing Time

Food continues to cook after it is taken out of a microwave oven, e.g. a potato keeps baking for 1-2 minutes.

A roast continues to cook, and its internal temperature rises, for 10-15 minutes after it is taken from the oven.

The appearance and texture of the food change during this time . . .

- crumble toppings become crisper
- cabbage softens and brightens
- hamburgers and chicken get browner
- cake surfaces dry out

If you wait until food looks and feels cooked before you take it from the oven, you may well find that it is overcooked after standing. If in doubt, undercook. Take food out after the recommended time. You can always put it back in the oven if it is still undercooked after standing. It is much harder to render first aid to overcooked food!

Cooking Times Vary

- Machines with different wattage cook at different rates. The higher the wattage, the faster the food will cook.

- The higher the power level, the quicker the cooking will be. A cake, for example, will take about twice as long to cook at 50% power as it does to cook at 100% power, other things being equal.
- Initial temperature is important. Food from the refrigerator takes longer to cook than food from a warm room.
- Large amounts of food take longer to cook than small amounts of the same food.
- Small pieces of food cook more quickly than large pieces, so finely chopped food will cook faster than large chunks, even though the total weight is the same.
- The shape of the container affects the cooking time, e.g. a cake in a ring-shaped mould will cook faster than a cake in a round pan.
- Food which is covered during cooking usually cooks faster than the same food, uncovered.
- Food placed so the densest part is to the outside will cook faster.
- A solid item which is turned over part way through cooking will cook more quickly and evenly than an unturned one.

When the total cooking time is very short, cooking food for a minute longer than necessary will mean it is overcooked. Because foods continue to cook after they are taken from the oven, you should try to stop cooking them just before they are completely cooked.

TO WARM PLATES

Put wet paper towels between plates.
Heat the pile of plates and wet towels on Full power until the plates are hot, allowing ½-1 minute per plate.

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ALISON HOLST MICROWAVE MENUS TWO

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“South of the Border” Vegetarian Meal

This meal gets its “South of the Border” feeling because of the chilli tomato sauce on the pasta and the cornbread which is served with it.

Although it is possible to cook macaroni products in the microwave, on many occasions it seems more sensible to microwave the sauce while cooking the pasta on the cook-top — which is what I do for this recipe.

Try the sauce at different times. It makes a delicious dip for corn chips either before or after the cheese is added.

Take care with the amount of hot chilli flavouring that you add. The safest way, if you want mild seasoning, is to leave out all chilli powder and add hot pepper sauce, a few drops at a time, until you reach the hotness that you like. The hotness of the added chilli decreases when the cheese is added, then again when the pasta is stirred in.

Because we live in a country where wheat grows well, we are used to flour-based breads. When climates get too hot and dry for wheat, corn is grown so cornbread is commonly eaten.

My microwaved version is very good.

Because of its natural golden colour, it is a good microwave recipe. If you have a microwave browning dish, I’m sure you will make cornbread often, since it is an easy and delicious quick bread.

A crisp green salad balances this meal well. If you want a Mexican feeling to your salad, include red and green (and yellow) peppers and avocado wedges.

“SOUTH OF THE BORDER” VEGETARIAN MEAL

Tomato and
Macaroni Cheese

Tossed Salad

Italian Dressing

Cornbread

Fresh Fruit and Nuts

Plan of Attack

When the menu is as simple as this you don’t have to worry about a plan of attack. The order I prepare the foods in this menu is:

1. Make the Cornbread first.

It will take approximately 6 minutes to heat the browning dish, 5 minutes to cook the cornbread and 2 minutes’ standing time. The bread can be prepared and mixed while the browning dish heats up.

2. Then prepare the Tomato and Macaroni Cheese. Cook the lumache in lightly salted water on the cook-top while you prepare the sauce in the microwave.

3. Make the Italian Dressing, using the recipe given, or a packet mix. The salad and the fresh fruit and nuts can be organised in between times.



Tomato and Macaroni Cheese

This recipe is made in three steps. You can stop after you have made the tomato sauce (or salsa) and serve it with corn chips as a tangy starting snack. After the cheese is added, you have a rich dip which is much more substantial than the first mixture. When the pasta is added, a filling main course results.

The more pasta you add, the more bland the sauce becomes. Vary the amount if you like. Add less if you want a more saucy, hotter mixture. Add more for a milder drier dish. Try tasting your mixture at the different stages in case you want to make one of the early versions at another time.

4 servings

¼ packet lumache

1 medium onion, quartered

2 large cloves garlic

1 tsp ground cumin

½ tsp marjoram or oregano

½-1 tsp chilli powder

½ tsp salt

1 (425g) can whole peeled tomatoes in juice

1 tsp chilli sauce

150g grated cheese (a soft cheese, e.g. mozzarella, gruyère or emmental)

2 tsp cornflour

1. Following the instructions on the packet, cook the lumache in lightly salted water in a pan on the stove.
2. In a food processor bowl, fitted with the metal chopping blade, put the onion, garlic, cumin, marjoram or oregano, add chilli powder and salt to suit your taste, and process until finely chopped.
3. Add the tomatoes and juice and the chilli sauce and process until the tomato is fairly small.

4. Tip into a microwave dish and cook on Full power for 6-8 minutes, stirring after about 4 minutes.

5. Add the grated cheese that has been tossed in cornflour. (If the cheese is too soft to grate, chop into small chunks.)

6. Drain the lumache and stir into the sauce, taking care not to break them.

7. Put the combined sauce, cheese and pasta back in the microwave oven and reheat if necessary. Do not boil. This mixture tastes best eaten just after everything is combined, so even if I've made the sauce ahead, I don't combine them until the last minute.

Variation: Serve the cheesy sauce as a dip with corn chips as a starter.

Tossed Salad

Choose a mixture of leaves for the salad. Look for the varieties in your local supermarket or fruit shop (e.g. different types of green and bronze leaved lettuce, watercress, spinach and silverbeet leaves and fresh herbs).

1. Wash, dry and chill salad greens. Refrigerate in a plastic bag to keep their crispness. For a Mexican feeling, add red, green or yellow peppers and avocado wedges to your tossed salad. They will add colour, and flavour to your salad. To prevent avocado wedges from discolouring, toss lightly in a little lemon juice.
2. Make Italian Dressing and store in a cool place in a screw-top jar. Always shake well before using.

Italian Dressing

This dressing coats all salad ingredients well because it is thicker than a plain oil and vinegar dressing.

2 Tbsp cornflour

½ cup cold water

¼ small onion, chopped

1 clove garlic

¼ cup wine vinegar

2 Tbsp tomato sauce

2 tsp sugar

1 tsp salt

½ tsp paprika

½ tsp oregano or marjoram

¼-½ cup corn or soya oil

1. Mix the cornflour and cold water to a smooth paste in a small bowl or measuring cup.
2. Microwave on Full power for 1 ½ minutes or until mixture boils and thickens.
3. While it cooks, combine all remaining ingredients, except oil, in a food processor or mixing bowl.
4. Process to combine or beat with a whisk.
5. Add oil in a thin stream, while processing or whisking.
6. Store in a cool place, in a bottle with a screw top, shaking before each use.

Cornbread

You can eat this cornbread fifteen minutes after you put the browning dish in the microwave oven to heat up, and start mixing! Because of its crisp browned top, this cornbread may well pass for a quick bread cooked conventionally.

There are different varieties of cornmeal available. I use a finely ground meal which includes the outer layers of the grain. This produces bread with a good texture, flavour and colour. If you use a coarse meal you will produce a bread with a slightly gritty texture which some New Zealanders may not like.

The buttermilk used in this recipe is a cultured product rather like yoghurt. Use the rest of the buttermilk in the litre container to make muffins, pancakes or scones, or simply to drink. Don't worry if you haven't used it up before its expiry date. It will be stronger in flavour — in fact, buttermilk devotees often do not start to use it until after this time.

Use a plain unsweetened yoghurt if you cannot buy buttermilk locally.

25g butter

¾ cup fine whole cornmeal

¼ cup wholemeal flour

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

1 Tbsp sugar

½ tsp salt

2 Tbsp parmesan cheese (optional)

1 egg,

1 cup buttermilk

1 Tbsp oil

1. Melt the butter in the microwave on Full power for 30 seconds or until liquid.
 2. Heat the browning dish in the microwave for approximately 6 minutes (refer to the manufacturer's instructions). At the end of this time the metal coating will have got very hot and the inside of the dish will be as hot as the inside of a frying pan.
 3. Into a mixing bowl measure the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, salt and parmesan cheese. Toss lightly to mix.
 4. In another bowl combine the melted butter, egg and buttermilk.
 5. When you know the browning dish is hot, tip the combined liquids into the dry ingredients. Stir just to mix.
 6. Pour about a tablespoon of oil into the hot browning dish then spoon in the batter, working quickly.
 7. Cover the dish with a lid or paper towel, and cook on Full power for 5 minutes or until the centre springs back when pressed lightly.
 8. Leave to stand for 2 minutes, then turn out on to the board you will cut it on.
- Note:** If you don't have a browning dish, spoon the batter into a ring pan and cook at the same power level for the same time, until the batter close to the ring insert is set. The cornbread won't have the same colour and texture, but it is worth making.

Variation: If you want to make a quick cornbread but don't have buttermilk on hand, substitute with yoghurt or 1 cup milk mixed with 1 Tbsp lemon juice. The flavour will be different, but the result will still be good.

Snacks for Friends

The foods which are cooked and served in this menu are some of the many foods suitable for quick preparation for informal meals.

They are foods which can be organised and partly prepared before they are needed, so that when a group of hungry young people arrive, the food can be put out to eat with the minimum of preparation by the young host or hostess.

Although the microwaved fresh corn on the cob has a season of only a few months, the Cheese Fondue and Barbecued Beef filled rolls are especially good in cold weather, for example, served after Saturday sports.

Half the fun of a cheese fondue is that it is placed in the centre of the table, so everybody can help themselves. A coffee table is a good serving venue. Another advantage of microwaving cheese fondue is that the dish can be readily reheated if necessary.

In warm weather it is sensible to serve foods like these outside, especially if you want to be sure nothing is dropped on the carpet.

Note: If you would like a group of young people entertained in one part of the house, remember that a microwave oven is portable, and may be plugged into a power outlet in a rumpus or games room. The semi-prepared food may be left beside it, ready to cook, since the messier preparation has been done ahead.

SNACKS FOR FRIENDS

Easy Cheese Fondue

Barbecued Beef
on French Bread
with Salad Vegetables

Corn on the Cob

Peanut Butter Squares

Coffee or Hot Mocha

Fresh Fruit

Plan of Attack

1. For a meal like this a plan of attack is not really necessary, because the food need not all be served at the same time
2. So that you have time to relax with your friends, assemble the ingredients you need and do most of the preparation ahead. Only the cooking needs to be done at the last minute.
3. Prepare the Peanut Butter Squares and leave to cool in the refrigerator before icing them. You may find they disappear. Hide them if you make them the day before!



Easy Cheese Fondue

I am sure that no self-respecting Swiss would lay claim to this microwaved cheese fondue! I make two versions — the first uses a fairly dry white wine and gruyère cheese, while the second uses beer and cheddar. Both are good. Try them both when you have the right ingredients to hand.

Cook the fondue in a microwavable dish, 17-20cm in diameter, shallow enough for chunks of french bread to be dipped into. If you are not a traditionalist, try dipping pieces of apple, pear, cauliflower, etc. into the fondue as well as bread.

2 cups (150g) grated cheddar or gruyère cheese
2 Tbsp flour
1 clove garlic, chopped
½ tsp nutmeg
1 cup flat or fresh beer or dry white wine

1. Mix grated cheese and flour in a bowl or flat-bottomed casserole dish.
2. Add garlic and nutmeg. Stir to mix.
3. Cover bowl and put aside, adding the liquid just before you are going to cook it.
4. Heat on Full power for 2 minutes, then stir (with a whisk, if possible).
5. Heat for another 2 minutes or until whole surface bubbles, stirring after each minute.
6. Serve hot, reheating fondue when it becomes cool.
7. To serve, dip crusty bread, apple or pear wedges or raw cauliflower into the hot fondue.

Barbecued Beef on French Bread

You can make barbecued beef with cooked or raw beef. Whichever you use, it should be sliced very thinly, against the grain of the muscle.

The best cooked beef to use is that from a lean roast which has been cooked to the rare or medium stage.

If you are using raw beef, choose rump steak, cross-cut blade (from which the central line of the gristle has been removed), flank skirt or schnitzel. Take great care not to overcook any of these.

For 2 servings:

2 hamburger buns or lengths of french bread
1 onion, very finely chopped
1 Tbsp oil
2 Tbsp tomato or chilli sauce
2 tsp tomato concentrate
1 Tbsp brown sugar
2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp mixed mustard
200g thinly sliced raw or cooked beef

1. Split bread and toast lightly, if desired.
2. Cook onion in oil in covered microwave dish, on Full power for 3 minutes.
3. Add next five ingredients.
4. Heat 3 minutes or until sauce bubbles.
5. Stir in beef, coating well with sauce.
6. Cover. If using raw beef, microwave on Full power for 3-4 minutes, until beef loses its pink colour. Heat cooked beef for 1-2 minutes or until hot. Spoon meat and sauce onto buns or lengths of french bread. Reheat if desired. Serve with salad vegetables.

Corn on the Cob

Sweetcorn is best cooked no more than 2-3 cobs at a time. Select freshly picked young corn cobs.

1. Put corn cobs (exactly as picked) in microwave oven with no wrapping, coating or additions.
2. Microwave on Full power for about 2-3 minutes per cob. Leave to stand for 1 minute.
3. Cut through stem end to detach all outer layers. Peel away outer layers and silk.
4. Add butter and eat immediately.

Peanut Butter Squares

Peanut Butter Squares always disappear with great speed!

Make them ahead and keep them in the refrigerator so they are cold and firm when eaten.

Because the squares are rich, cut them into small pieces. The people who don't care about calories can always have several small pieces.

100 g butter

½ cup peanut butter

1 cup biscuit crumbs

1 cup icing sugar

about 6 drops almond essence

¼ tsp vanilla

½ cup White Melts

2 tsp butter

1. In a large microwave bowl put the butter (cut into cubes) and the peanut butter (in 4-5 blobs) and microwave on Full power for 2 minutes, or until you can blend them easily.
2. Stir in crumbs, icing sugar and essences. Mix well.
3. Press the mixture into a square pan.
4. In another dish, melt chocolate and second measure of butter in the microwave on Full power for 1-2 minutes, or until the two can be mixed together smoothly.
5. Spread on top of peanut butter mixture.
6. Cool before cutting into small pieces.

Coffee from ground beans

Make up the quantity of coffee you require, using your favourite method. Reheat a cup of the coffee in the microwave on Full power for about 1½ minutes, when you want hot coffee. Two or three cup quantities can be heated in a glass or china jug as long as the container has no metal decoration or screws, etc, is not too tall and narrow or is not constricted at the top.

Do not let the coffee boil as the pressure of bubbling liquid can break tall, narrow-necked containers.

Hot Mocha

This is an interesting winter drink for children or adults. Alter the proportion of ingredients if you like.

For 1 large serving:

1½ Tbsp drinking chocolate

1-2 tsp instant coffee

sugar to taste

1 cup milk

whipped cream

cinnamon or chocolate curls

Mix drinking chocolate, instant coffee, sugar and milk in a mug. Microwave on Full power until steaming (1½ minutes). Top with lightly whipped cream and add a pinch of cinnamon or chocolate curls.

Chilli Con Carne Variations

There are times when I use my microwave oven mainly for speed, but it is useful for other reasons, too.

I make many variations of this spiced mince, tomato and bean mixture. The microwave oven ensures that the mixture cooks long enough to combine the ingredients and blend the flavours without any danger of burning. What's more, I know I can warm up the mixture efficiently after, or thaw it if I have frozen it for longer keeping. Whichever way I choose to serve the chilli, the microwave will make my meal service more efficient and labour-saving. I hope that you will experiment with your own variations of this basic dish. You can try coarsely or finely minced meats, or use beef mince, lamb or mutton mince, pork mince, or mixtures such as pork and veal mince.

Add more or less onion and less or more garlic — I often add an extra onion or two. If you like, add chopped celery or carrot at the same time as the onion, or add frozen peas or canned corn a short time before serving. Although these additions are not traditional, I am sure that the originators of this recipe would have added them, had they been available.

Add the hotness of chilli in any way you like. You can use chilli powder, cayenne pepper, hot pepper sauce or small whole chillis. If you are not sure of the hotness of these different products, add hot pepper sauce, drop by drop, near the end. The amount you add is easy to regulate and by stirring and tasting frequently, you can get exactly the hotness you want.

If you are over-generous with the chilli you will have to add something bland to dilute the hotness. More meat, onions or mildly flavoured baked beans should have the desired effect. Extra liquid helps here, too.

CHILLI CON CARNE VARIATIONS

Chilli Con Carne
on
Rice
with
Poppadoms
or
Corn Chips

—
“Sloppy Joes”
with
Crisp Vegetable Sticks

—
Make Your Own
Mexican Tacos
or
Tostadas
(with assorted toppings)

If you use canned beans, you should experiment with different brands and flavours. You will find that the use of chilli- or barbecue-flavoured beans will give the mixture much more character. When you use them both you may want to reduce the quantity of other seasonings.

Cumin and oregano, which are often added to American chilli powders, give an interesting flavour to the whole mixture. If you leave them out of this recipe it will lose a lot of its appeal.

Experiment to see which combinations and ways of serving you like the best.

Plan of Attack

Whichever way you choose to serve this chilli mixture, you can prepare and cook it whenever it suits you, and warm it up. In fact, its flavour improves when it is reheated from room or refrigerator temperature, or from the freezer.

Microwaved rice can be cooked while the meat is standing. Cook the rice early enough to allow 5-10 minutes' standing time. If you like, cook the rice ahead and reheat it also, adding a sprinkling of water before warming it up, if you think it may be too dry.

Poppadoms are best cooked within a few minutes of serving. If you want to cook them in advance, store them in airtight plastic bags to keep them crisp.

It is possible to freshen corn chips or taco shells in a microwave oven, as long as they are not too stale. If they have a rancid flavour, throw them out. The microwave oven can not work miracles.

If you are serving your chilli in split bread rolls, you have the choice of toasting the rolls (before or after splitting them) or of warming them up in the microwave oven just before you serve them. Microwaving will not make them crisper but this does not matter if you start with nice crisp rolls.



Chilli Con Carne

Serve Chilli Con Carne in different ways:

1. On rice, with corn chips or pieces of poppadom served on the side for crunch. Serve a separate side salad if desired.
2. Serve as “Sloppy Joes”, spooning the mixture over halved buns or rolls, which have been toasted or warmed, or on toast.
3. Serve on crisp, flat, fried tortillas as tostadas, or in folded, fried tortillas (taco shells), with shredded lettuce and cheese, sour cream, avocado, tomato, etc. (Replace tortillas with toasted pita bread or poppadoms if they are not available.)

This chilli-flavoured mince and bean mixture is interesting, filling and tasty. It is a useful mixture to serve when you have a number of people to feed, because it is best made ahead and warmed when needed.

You can serve it in a variety of ways — whichever suits you best. If you are feeding only one or two people, serve it different ways over several days. Add the hot sauce after everything else has been heated together. Keep tasting, after adding each few drops, until you get it to the hotness that suits you.

4-6 servings

500g mince
2 medium onions, chopped
2 large cloves garlic, chopped
¼ tsp chopped dried chillis (or 2 small dried chillies, chopped)
2 tsp oregano
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp paprika
1 can (420g) tomatoes in juice
1 (450g) can chilli beans
1 (450g) can barbecue beans
1 green pepper, chopped

1. Combine the first 7 ingredients in a large, microwave dish. Microwave, uncovered, on Full power for 5-7 minutes, stirring after each 2 minutes, until the meat is no longer pink.
2. Add the tomatoes and juice, beans and green pepper.
3. Cover and cook for a further 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Variation: Replace the cooked canned beans above with other baked bean varieties, if desired, or add cooked kidney or haricot beans (see recipe opposite), 1-2 cups of extra tomatoes, or tomato purée and a little salt to taste.

Rice

Although you can serve Chilli Con Carne on any type of long grain rice, a rice with a good flavour of its own will make the whole mixture more interesting. I use Basmati rice for preference. If I do not have any of this, I use Uncle Ben rice.

1 cup Basmati or other long grain rice
2 tsp oil or butter
½ tsp salt
2¼ cups hot water

1. Put all the ingredients into a microwave dish and microwave, covered, on Full power for 12 minutes.
2. Leave to stand for 5-10 minutes. During this time the rice will soak up the rest of the water and finish cooking.
3. Fluff up with a fork. The rice doesn't need draining and never burns on the bottom.
4. Reheat if necessary.

Note: If you find the rice boiling over, leave the lid ajar or add boiling water and cook at Medium (50%) for 15 minutes or Defrost (30% power) for longer — about 20 minutes.

Poppadoms

Poppadoms are flat pancake-like crisp-breads, made from pea flour with added flavourings. Buy them from ‘delis’ and specialty food stores.

They keep, uncooked, for a long time and may be cooked, like magic, in a microwave oven in a very short time.

Experiment with different brands and flavours. The flavour, texture and cooked appearance vary widely. You can see from the way the texture and appearance change, when the poppadoms are cooked.

Remove each poppadom from the microwave oven as soon as it has cooked — time will vary with size and with each variety.

1. Put 1 large or 2 small poppadoms, straight from their packet, on a paper towel.
2. Microwave, uncovered, on Full power for 45 seconds to 1 minute, until the whole surface buckles.
3. Remove before poppadom browns and leave 30 seconds. Whole surface should be crisp. Adjust times, if necessary.
4. Serve pieces of cooked poppadoms to scoop up chilli or use whole poppadoms to replace cooked tortillas, etc.

Corn Chips

Corn chips or potato chips are nice dipped into the mince and bean mixture. You can freshen softish or slightly stale chips in your microwave oven, but you cannot remove the taste of rancid oil. If you have just bought chips which taste rancid, return them to the store. If you have kept them too long, throw them out. To freshen chips arrange them on several layers of paper towel, or on a ridged microwave roasting pan. Microwave at Full power until the food feels warm. To make corn chips from uncooked tortillas, see following recipe.

Tortillas, Tacos, Tostadas and Corn Chips

A tortilla is a flat round, unraised, uncooked bread made from a special corn meal. Tortillas, which are sometimes available (fresh or frozen) at 'delis' and speciality food shops, do not cook well in a microwave oven, but should be fried in oil at least 5mm deep, turning once or twice. They should be pressed down as they cook, to keep them under the oil. Tortillas take about a minute to cook in moderately hot oil. Drain on paper towels. Corn chips are traditionally made by cutting the uncooked tortilla into six or eight wedges, then frying these until they are crisp. Taco shells are fried and folded tortillas, which may be bought, cooked, in various sizes. They may be crisped in the microwave before they are filled. Add fillings and toppings just before eating.

A tortilla which has been fried, flat, then used as the base of a mince-bean-salad mixture is called a tostada. To make tostadas, or fill taco shells, assemble the filling ingredients in order of use. It is fun for each person to choose the toppings they like.

Suggested toppings:
chilli-meat-bean mixture
shredded lettuce
grated cheese
sour cream or plain yoghurt
tomato slices or wedges
mashed avocado or wedges
onion rings
spring onions
chilli sauce

Eat as finger food, rather than with knives and forks. Tacos and tostadas can be messy to eat, especially if the meat mixture is wet. Have plenty of paper serviettes to hand!

To Cook Dried Beans

1 cup dried haricot or kidney beans
3 cups boiling water

1. Pour boiling water over the dried beans in a large bowl or casserole.
2. Cover and microwave at Full power for 15 minutes, making sure that the mixture is boiling vigorously during this time.
3. Lower power level to Defrost (30% power) and cook for about 45 minutes longer, until the beans are soft enough to disintegrate when squeezed. Add extra boiling water during cooking if necessary.

Note: It is essential that kidney beans are boiled vigorously during their cooking.

Variation: Leave beans to soak in the boiling water for an hour before cooking. Bring to boil, boil vigorously for 15 minutes then cook as above. Cooking time will be shorter — probably about 30 minutes.

A Posh Picnic

A microwave does much more than save you time and effort. In this menu, it will help you in additional ways.

You will save time cooking your terrine and bread, and this is important when the weather is balmy and pleasant and you don't want to spend unnecessary time in your kitchen. It's also nice to know that you won't be heating up your kitchen when you cook with your microwave oven.

You won't be attracting all the flies in the neighbourhood into your kitchen either, because the cooking odours are reduced a lot. However, as we know from microwaving this brown bread in a television studio, you do still get the irresistible smell of home baked bread! Isn't it interesting the way people gravitate to the kitchen when bread is coming out of the oven or cooling on the table.

Microwaved bread tends to be heavy, a quality I like in this firm "grainy" brown bread. The pre-cooked kibbled wheat adds texture to this loaf and ensures it will stay moist and fresh for longer.

As you prepare the bread and dip for this menu, you will see some of the ways your microwave oven will help to streamline the steps in your food preparation.

It is very convenient being able to use the microwave oven to warm bread dough while it rises, without overheating it. You can take advantage of this, even if you intend to bake light textured, crusty bread in your conventional oven.

Similarly, when you are making Blue Cheese Ball (or Dip) the job is so much easier if you can bring the cream cheese to a warm creaming temperature in a short time.

A POSH PICNIC

Blue Cheese Ball or Dip
with
Fresh Vegetables

Country Terrine

Homemade Brown Bread

Bread and Butter Pickles

Fresh Fruit

Remember that the food in this menu is versatile. Although it is suitable for an elegant picnic, it may be served for other purposes. The terrine goes well with potato and other salads as a main course. For a dinner party, serve the Country Terrine neatly sliced with a suitable small salad for the first course.

Cut smaller pieces to serve on crackers, or make delicious sandwiches for packed lunches.

The dip thickens on standing, and may be used as a spread or sandwich filling, too. If not thinned down as it is made, the dip may be formed into a ball, which looks attractive surrounded by crackers when served with cocktails.

Plan of Attack

1. Prepare the terrine. Put all the ingredients out on your workbench before you start, so you can put everything together fast. The terrine, which needs to cool before you serve it, can be made first or after you have mixed the bread and left it to rise.

2. Start the bread at least an hour and a half before you want to eat it. It doesn't take long to prepare, but its rising time will be about 1 hour if given 1 minute bursts on Defrost (30% power) every 10 minutes, i.e. until the loaf has risen to almost double its size.

3. While the bread rises and then cooks for 15-16 minutes, prepare the Blue Cheese Ball or Dip and slice the vegetables to serve with the dip.



Blue Cheese Ball or Dip

The Blue Cheese Ball or spread is one of my favourites — I've made it for 25 years. It isn't cooked in the microwave, but I use the microwave to soften the cream cheese so it blends easily with the other ingredients.

*1 carton (250g) cream cheese
1 Tbsp onion pulp and juice
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
¼-½ cup grated blue vein cheese (e.g. Blue de Montagne or Blue Supreme)
1 Tbsp sherry or brandy*

1. Put the cream cheese in the microwave oven. Depending on the initial temperature of the cream cheese and whether it was a firm or soft cream cheese, it will take 1-2 minutes on Medium (50% power) to soften to a consistency where it will blend quickly and easily with the other ingredients. Take care to remove all the foil from the container before putting it into the microwave.
2. To the softened cream cheese add the onion pulp and juice made by scraping the cut surface of the onion with a teaspoon.
3. Stir in the Worcestershire sauce, grated cheese and sherry or brandy.
4. The firm mixture can be coated in fresh herbs or nuts to serve as a ball.

Variation: To thin the mixture down for a dip, add buttermilk, yoghurt, crème fraîche or sour cream.

Both mixtures can be potted for serving later with crisp sticks of celery and carrots, young beans, asparagus or cauliflorets. If kept for a long time this dip will probably need thinning down occasionally.

Country Terrine

This terrine cooks quickly and tastes excellent, but it is not an exciting mixture when it is raw!

*300g cubed lamb's liver
1 egg
¼ cup sherry
1-2 garlic cloves
½ tsp salt
1 tsp fresh thyme
¼ tsp grated nutmeg
¼ tsp dried sage
½ tsp ground cloves
300g sausage meat
2-4 thin rashers of bacon*

1. Trim and cut liver into small cubes.
2. Purée in a food processor or blender, then add the egg, sherry and seasonings.
3. Add sausage meat in several pieces, process until mixed.
4. Line a microwave loaf pan with loaf pan Teflon liners or a strip of ovenbag down its long sides and bottom. Arrange thin bacon strips on bottom or on the bottom and sides. Pour the mixture evenly over this. Fold ends of ovenbag or liner over meat. Cover with clingwrap or a lid.
5. Stand loaf pan on an inverted plate. Microwave on Medium-high (70% power) for 6-7 minutes or until loaf springs back when pressed and juices from centre do not run pink. Cooking time will be longer if terrine is small and deep.
6. Invert the lid of the container so it pushes down on the surface of the terrine, or lay something flat on the terrine and weigh down with cans, or anything heavy, until cold.
7. Unmould and slice as required.

Homemade Brown Bread

This makes a well flavoured, heavy-textured, unknéaded brown loaf which will remain moist for days. The top of the loaf tends to be flat, rather than rounded. The dough is kept close to body temperature, as it rises, by brief “bursts” in the microwave oven at Defrost (30% power).

1 tsp dried yeast granules
1 tsp sugar
½ cup warm water
½ cup kibbled wheat
1 cup cold water
2 Tbsp treacle
½ cup rolled oats
1½ cups wholemeal flour
¾ cup flour
1½ tsp salt
1 Tbsp oil
½ cup milk
toasted sesame or sunflower seeds

1. In a small container mix the yeast, sugar and lukewarm water. Leave to stand in a warm place until the surface bubbles.
2. Measure the kibbled wheat into a fairly large plastic mixing bowl.
3. Add the water and bring to the boil, about 4 minutes on Full power.
4. Leave to stand for 1 minute, then drain off the liquid, leaving the wheat in the bowl.
5. Stir in the treacle.
6. Without mixing, add the rolled oats, flours, salt, oil and milk into the kibbled wheat.
7. Tip in the bubbly yeast mixture and beat well to mix everything thoroughly. Heat in the microwave oven on Defrost (30% power) for 1 minute. Stir and feel temperature of dough. If quite cool, heat again until dough has warmed to body temperature. DO NOT OVERHEAT.

8. Spoon dough into a loaf tin lined along the bottom and long sides with a strip of cling wrap or a Teflon liner. Moisten top and sprinkle with toasted sesame or sunflower seeds. Leave to rise in a warm steamy place or stand in microwave oven.
9. Microwave on Defrost (30% power) for 1 minute every 10 minutes. When dough has risen to double its bulk after about 1 hour, stand loaf tin on an inverted dinner plate. Cook, uncovered, on Medium (50% power) for 16 minutes or until firm in the middle and cooked on the bottom.
10. Remove bread from the pan, turning in extra kibbled wheat, toasted sesame or sunflower seeds, if desired.

Bread and Butter Pickles

This pickle seems to be everybody’s favourite, in sandwiches, on crackers, with cheese and cold meat. It looks and tastes very good when used as a garnish on terrine, or brown bread.

2 cups sliced cucumber
1 cup sliced onion
2 Tbsp plain salt
¾ cup white vinegar
¾ cup sugar
1 tsp mustard seed
1 tsp celery seed
¼ tsp turmeric

1. Slice hothouse cucumber(s) to fill a 2 cup measure. Slice onions thinly and measure.
2. Combine vegetables, sprinkle with salt and leave 30 minutes. Drain and rinse well.
3. In a large, deep, heat-resistant bowl or casserole, combine white vinegar, sugar and flavourings. Microwave on Full power for 2 minutes. Stir to dissolve sugar. Heat again until boiling rapidly.
4. Add vegetables, stir well, heat until bubbling around the edge.
5. Seal for long storage (see below), or pour into large jar without sealing and refrigerate, if it is to be used within several weeks.

Note: If pickles are to be eaten within a few weeks, do not seal the jars but keep them in the refrigerator. For longer storage or for gifts, seal the preserves in clean jars which have been heated thoroughly and have laquered metal screw-on lids.

Wash jars thoroughly, then:

- (a) Heat in conventional oven at 140°C for 15 minutes or
 - (b) Boil in a large bowl or saucepan in water to cover or
 - (c) Quarter fill jars with water and microwave until water boils for 1 minute.
- To sterilise metal lids, drop them in a container of boiling water. Do not microwave.
Pour hot pickles into hot jars to within 1cm of top. Screw on hot lid immediately.

Fast Fish

After you have become reasonably familiar with your microwave oven, you will start looking at many of your “old” recipes, and working out how to cook them in the microwave. Often the microwaved version will be as good as the original, sometimes it will need modification, and at times you will decide that you will stick with your old recipe, and continue to cook it conventionally. For this menu, I’ve modified several recipes so they are microwavable. Sushi, Whole Flatfish and Easy Fish Fillets cook so much better and easier in the microwave oven, that I would never make them conventionally again, and now make them more frequently than I used to. Each cooks evenly and quickly, without sticking to its cooking container.

Sushi, which may be served at the table, on small plates, or passed as finger food, is a good starter. In fact, I think it makes a good snack at any time of day — I could cheerfully eat sushi for breakfast, if it was put in front of me — and it certainly adds interest to packed lunches.

Small (frozen) whole flatfish are often available cheaply. They should be scaled and gutted before they are frozen, and most certainly before cooking.

For people who cannot be bothered lifting fish flesh from bones, serve Easy Fish Fillets instead.

Single servings of both of these fish dishes may be cooked on the plate from which they will be eaten.

Serve a salad (or several salads), warm up crisp bread rolls or bread sticks, and you have an easy quick meal.

FAST FISH

Sushi

Whole Flatfish

Easy Fish Fillets

Crisp Green Salad

Bread Rolls

Plan of Attack

1. Prepare the Sushi first because it is eaten cold.
2. Prepare the fish when it suits you, but cook it just before it is eaten.
3. Prepare a salad to serve with the fish and bread rolls.
4. While the fish stands for a few minutes after cooking, the bread rolls can be warmed. Place the bread rolls in a napkin-lined basket and microwave on Full power until the outside of the bread feels slightly warm. Six rolls will take about 15 seconds. Do not overheat — the centre of the bread is always hotter than the crust.



Sushi

When you make sushi, you want the rice grains to stick together. Instead of using long grain rice, use sticky short grain (pudding) rice. Cook it in water until it is tender, then add the seasonings. If these are added earlier the rice cooking is slowed down.

If you have trouble with the rice boiling over as it cooks, you have several options.

(a) Use a bigger dish.

(b) Put the lid ajar.

(c) Lower the power level and increase the cooking time.

The sticky, seasoned rice may then be shaped in different ways to make sushi.

1 cup short grain rice

2 cups water

2 Tbsp dry sherry

2 Tbsp wine vinegar

2 Tbsp sugar

1 tsp salt

1. Cook the rice and water in a 2 litre covered casserole on Full power for 10 minutes.

2. Stir in the remaining ingredients and heat 2 minutes longer.

3. Leave until warm, before shaping.

4. Lightly toast a sheet of thin dried seaweed, by holding it briefly over a hot element or burner until it develops an interesting aroma. (Buy “instant seaweed” sheets at a store which supplies Japanese foodstuffs.)

5. Place seaweed on a sheet of plastic, then spread evenly with some of the sushi rice. Top with strips of thin omelette, strips of blanched spinach leaves, crisp carrot, cucumber or celery and strips of smoked salmon.

6. Roll like a sponge roll. Wrap in plastic.

7. When firm, cut in 1-2cm thick slices, and serve as appetisers.

Variations: (a) To make Californian sushi, roll up the seaweed and rice with a strip of avocado in the shape of an arum lily.

(b) Squeeze small handfuls of sushi rice to make egg-shaped cakes. Cover each of these with a thin slice of smoked salmon or any other firm, fresh raw fish which has been dipped in a mixture of:

2 Tbsp water

1 Tbsp wine vinegar

1 tsp sugar

½ tsp salt

(c) Make flattened round cakes. Top with raw oysters which have been dipped in the sauce above.

Opening Oysters in the Shell

1. Arrange oysters in shells in a circle in a shallow covered casserole.

2. Microwave on Full power. Start with 5 seconds per shellfish. Remove as soon as each opens slightly.

3. Insert knife to cut muscle.

Whole Flatfish

For easy service, cook each fish separately, one after the other, on the plate on which it will be served.

It is important to slash the fish deeply for even cooking.

Brush the fish with melted butter (or oil) before cooking to speed up its cooking time.

For 1 serving:

1 sole or flounder (about 200g)

2 tsp butter

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

paprika

1. Cut the cleaned, scaled fish several times on each side, to the backbone.

2. Heat butter and garlic on Full power until bubbling (about 1 minute).

3. Brush garlic butter over lower, then upper surface of fish, especially into cuts. Sprinkle with paprika.

4. Place fish on a serving plate, cover whole plate tightly with cling wrap. Do not cut any air vents.

5. Cook on Full power for 2 minutes. Stand 2 minutes before removing wrap to serve.

Easy Fish Fillets

Try this simple, but very good recipe before you experiment with other more complicated fish recipes.

For 4 servings:

4 fish fillets (100-150g each)

1½ Tbsp butter

1 tsp garlic salt

½ tsp paprika

2 Tbsp chopped parsley (or other fresh herb)

1. In a dish large enough to hold fillets in one layer, melt butter on Full power for about 1 minute.
2. Turn fillets in the melted butter and arrange in the dish with thicker parts towards the edges.
3. Sprinkle with garlic salt, paprika and parsley, using more or less seasoning, according to taste.
4. Cover plate and fish with cling wrap (without venting it) and microwave for 4-5 minutes, until the fish is opaque in the thickest parts.
5. Let stand for 2-3 minutes before uncovering. During this time the film will probably suck down onto the fish and press the seasonings onto the surface of the fish.
6. Serve with wedges of lemon.

Variation: When cooking one fillet for one person cook it on the plate from which it will be served and eaten. Reduce quantities of other ingredients proportionately.

Juicing Lemons

To obtain more juice from a lemon, place it in the microwave oven and heat it on Full power for 20-40 seconds, depending on the size of the fruit. The lemon should feel just warm.

Let the lemon stand for about 3 minutes, then roll it several times between your hands, or on a board, before cutting and squeezing.

To Warm Plates

Put wet paper towels between plates.

Heat the pile of plates and wet towels on

Full power until the plates are hot, allowing ½-1 minute per plate.

Sausages for the Family

The various dishes served in this easy family meal are favourites in my house.

Corn Chowder, made from a can of creamed corn, is quick to prepare, but like all soups you will find the flavour is even better if you make the soup ahead and reheat it after it has stood for ½ hour or more.

Using a browning dish gives sausages the browned surface and crunch that we associate with conventionally cooked sausages.

The microwaved cabbage has excellent colour and crunch. You can adjust the crunchiness by adding a little water to the cabbage as it cooks.

A colourful topping improves the appearance of the Potato Cake, but it has such a nice flavour with or without the topping that it may well become one of your family's favourites.

SAUSAGES FOR THE FAMILY

Corn Chowder

—

Saucy Sausages

Potato Cake

Cabbage

Plan of Attack

You can cook all these foods in your microwave oven, but it often makes sense to cook one dish on the cook-top while you make other things in your microwave oven.

1. Make the Corn Chowder first. It can then be reheated just before serving.
2. While the soup cooks, shape the sausages and coat in savoury or plain dried crumbs.
3. If you prefer to coat the sausages in Savoury Crumbs prepare them and cook as soon as the chowder is cooked.
4. Heat the browning dish according to the manufacturer's instructions.
5. Cook the sausages and during their cooking time, prepare the onions, apples and sauce ingredients.
6. Add to browning dish and continue as in recipe.
7. Prepare the Potato Cake while the Saucy Sausages cook.
8. Cook Potato Cake, remembering to stand for 2 minutes before turning out.
9. Slice cabbage and pan-cook on cook-top or microwave, remembering the 2 minutes' standing time.



Corn Chowder

This is a quick and easy corn chowder made with a can of creamed corn.

For 4 servings:

*2 Tbsp butter
1 large onion, chopped
2 stalks celery, sliced
1 medium carrot, grated
1 Tbsp flour
1 (450g) can creamed corn
2 cups boiling water
chopped parsley
fresh herbs
salt and pepper
sugar*

1. In a large bowl or casserole dish, put butter, onion, celery and carrot.
2. Cover and cook on Full power for 8 minutes, stirring after 2 minutes.
3. Stir in flour, then add creamed corn and boiling water.
4. Cook, uncovered, for 8-10 minutes longer, until bubbling, then taste and season as you like, adding fresh herbs, salt, pepper and a little sugar, if desired.

Savoury Crumbs

These easy-to-make crumbs are well coloured, crisp and excellent for coating microwaved food, to make it appear as though it has been cooked conventionally.

*1 Tbsp butter
2 cups fresh breadcrumbs
1-2 Tbsp chopped parsley or other fresh herbs
(optional)*

1. In a flat-bottomed microwave dish, 20-30cm diameter, melt the butter on Full power for about 30 seconds.
2. Stir in the crumbs, made from stale bread, and the herbs.
3. Microwave, uncovered, for 2-4 minutes until the crumbs brown, stirring often once the crumbs change colour.

Note: The crumbs in the centre of the dish usually brown first. Crumbs become crisp and crunchy when cold.

Saucy Sausages

I prefer sausages which are crumbed rather than served in skins, but you can use whichever you like.

You usually get the cheapest sausages by buying bulk sausage meat in plastic tubs, shaping it into sausage-shaped pieces with wet hands then turning the sausages in fine dry breadcrumbs or Savoury Crumbs.

If you are going to make this recipe, and you do not have a browning dish, you should definitely coat the sausages with Savoury Crumbs, since they have a much better colour than dry crumbs.

Crumbed sausages don't brown as well in a microwave as they do in a frying pan, but they cook well. This tasty sauce improves both their colour and flavour.

For 4 servings:

*8 crumbed sausages
1 Tbsp oil
2 Tbsp butter
2 medium onions, thinly sliced
2 medium apples, thinly sliced
1 tsp dry mustard
1 tsp instant beef stock
½ tsp celery salt
¼ cup brown sugar
2 tsp cornflour
2 Tbsp dark soya sauce
½ cup tomato sauce
1 cup boiling water*

1. Heat browning dish according to manufacturer's instructions. Make sure sausages are an even shape.
2. Add oil to hot browning dish. Add sausages, side by side. Cook on Full power for 3 minutes, turn over and cook 3 minutes longer.
3. Remove from dish. If browning dish has sides and a lid, make sauce in it. Otherwise, use another dish. Put butter, onions and apples in a covered dish.
4. Cook until tender, 4-6 minutes, stirring twice. While they cook, stir together dry ingredients, add sauces and boiling water. Pour over apple and onion and cover.
5. Cook sauce until thick and bubbly and serve over sausages, or add sausages and reheat in sauce.

Potato Cake

For greatest speed, and for nice dry potato shreds, cut the potatoes using the shredding attachment of a food processor. Don't bother peeling the potatoes. Just scrub them well before grating them.

Don't leave out the rinsing step — the potatoes will be much less sticky if they are washed then drained in a sieve. If you are working with sticky potatoes, you may have trouble tipping the potato cake out of its ring pan. You will have no problems if you use a Teflon liner, however. Because nothing seems to stick to this, you will find the potato cake drops out on to a flat plate with an unblemished surface — just like magic!

4 servings

4 potatoes

25g butter

1 or 2 cloves garlic

2 tsp instant green herb stock

*¼ cup chopped spring onion or finely
chopped parsley*

½-1 cup grated cheese

parsley and paprika

1. Scrub potatoes and grate coarsely.
2. Heat butter and finely chopped garlic in small ring pan until butter is liquid.
3. Rinse potatoes with cold water and drain thoroughly in sieve.
4. Mix with melted butter, green herb stock and spring onion or parsley in a large mixing bowl. Press evenly and lightly into ring pan. Cover with vented plastic film.
5. Microwave on Full power for 10 minutes, or until potato is tender.
6. Leave 2 minutes, then turn on to flat plate. Sprinkle evenly with cheese, parsley and paprika. Reheat before serving if necessary. Cut into slices.

Cabbage

Cabbage microwaves well, keeping good colour and slight crunchiness. For nice green cabbage do not discard the greener leaves near the outside. Add up to 1 Tbsp of water per serving of cabbage if you like a softer product. Cabbage cooked without any water is rather like hot coleslaw.

1. Allow 75-100g per serving.
2. Slice thinly, removing thick ribs.
3. Add 2-3 tsp water per serving, if desired.
4. Cook on Full power, allowing 1-1½ minutes per serving.

Note: Pan-cooked cabbage for four people will take about the same time as microwaved cabbage, 4-5 minutes.

To Warm Plates

Put wet paper towels between plates.

Heat the pile of plates and wet towels on

Full power until the plates are hot, allowing ½-1 minute per plate.

Dinner for One, Please James

This menu is specially planned to help you on days when you walk in the door and feel that you just don't have enough energy to go into the kitchen, let alone to cook.

If you cook for a family, you will find it invaluable for occasions when somebody has to have a meal before everybody else, because of sports practice, swimming or music lessons — or any one of many activities.

You can prepare this menu with the absolute minimum amount of mess and dishwashing, because you can prepare, cook and serve each of the two courses in only one container. It is especially geared to one person, but you can, of course, multiply quantities and cook in larger containers for more people.

I think it is worth investing in a small covered casserole — deep enough to cook in and shallow enough to eat from. I use a “snack plate with lid” made by Willow. If you don't have something with a lid, cover the container with plastic cling wrap while the food cooks.

As far as the pudding goes, I use a tough stemmed glass, in which I can serve fruit juice, beer, wine and ice cream, and make a cooked microwaved pudding as well. You may find a tough plastic container that will serve the same purposes. If you don't have a suitable container just make the pudding in a glass or plastic measuring cup, or in a mug. Use the two main recipes as guides to formulate your own “lazy day” specialties.

As a bonus, you will find that these two basic recipes can be “dressed up” without much trouble — if you add a salad and/or a separate vegetable and/or a warmed up bread roll.

DINNER FOR ONE, PLEASE JAMES

Cook-in-the-Plate
Easy Dinner

Optional Salad

Optional Bread Roll

Chocolate Pudding
(plain or fancy)

You can make many variations of the Chocolate Pudding, although it is very good in its basic version. By adding a little fruit, or nuts, or cream, the basic pudding can become an exciting family favourite.

And as a final note — if you know that you are likely to cook the main dish often, buy a kilo of mince, divide it into 100g (or 125g) portions, and freeze these in patty-shapes individually wrapped. You can thaw one of these in a few minutes at Defrost, while you are assembling the other ingredients.

Plan of Attack

1. For this menu, I usually cook the Chocolate Pudding first to give it time to cool down.
2. Make the Cook-in-the-Plate Easy Dinner next. The potato version will take 6 minutes to cook, and the pasta recipe will take 10 minutes, but both require 3-4 minutes' standing time.
3. Prepare a salad if you are not too weary, and heat a bread roll.



Cook-in-the-Plate Easy Dinner

While this recipe is, basically, the easiest and quickest meat and vegetable mixture you can prepare, it is still very good nutritionally. You can choose to make the potato version for one, or the pasta version for one or four people.

Cook-in-the-Plate Easy Dinner with Potato

100g lean minced beef (or lamb)
*1 or 2 cloves garlic, crushed, or ¼ onion,
finely chopped*
*1 cup fresh vegetables, e.g. carrot, corn, peas,
beans, broccoli or celery*
1 (100g) potato
1 Tbsp tomato soup powder
¼ tsp dark soya sauce
paprika, oregano, marjoram or thyme, if desired
½ cup boiling water

1. In a lidded dish mix together the mince, garlic or onion and the prepared vegetables, which should be cut the same size as the corn or peas.
2. Scrub the potato, cut into cubes the size of the other vegetables and add to dish.
3. Add the soup powder, soya sauce and paprika or herbs, as desired.
4. Pour over the boiling water.
5. Cover the dish and put in the microwave oven, on a paper towel in case it boils over.
6. Cook on Full power for 6 minutes.
7. Stand for 3-4 minutes before serving.

Cook-in-the-Plate Easy Dinner with Pasta

100g lean minced beef (or lamb)
*1 or 2 cloves garlic, chopped, or ¼ onion,
chopped*
¼ cup frozen mixed vegetables
1 Tbsp tomato soup powder (about ¼ packet)
¼ tsp dark soya sauce
paprika, oregano, marjoram or thyme, if desired
*¼ cup pasta, e.g. periciacelli, small shells, risone
or a little less alphabet noodles*
1 cup boiling water

1. In a small, lidded dish mix together the mince, garlic or onion, and the frozen vegetables.
2. Sprinkle over the tomato soup powder, add soya sauce, flavourings and the pasta.
3. Pour over the boiling water and stir to mix.
4. Cook, covered, on Full power for 10 minutes.
5. Stand for 3-4 minutes before serving.

Cook-in-the-Plate Easy Dinner for Four

400g lean minced beef (or lamb)
*2 cloves garlic, chopped, or 2 medium onions,
chopped*
3 cups frozen or fresh mixed vegetables
1 packet (45g) tomato soup powder
1 tsp dark soya sauce
*paprika or finely chopped herbs, e.g. parsley,
thyme, oregano or marjoram*
*1 cup pasta, e.g. periciacelli, risone, macaroni,
little shells*
4 cups boiling water
2 tsp tomato concentrate

1. Mix together the mince, garlic or onion, and the vegetables (cut into small even pieces if fresh) in a 2 litre covered microwave dish.
2. Sprinkle over the tomato soup powder, add the soya sauce, paprika or herbs and stir to combine.
3. Add the pasta.
4. Pour over the boiling water and add the tomato concentrate. Stir.
5. Cook, covered, on Full power for 30-35 minutes.
6. Allow 5 minutes' standing time before serving.

Chocolate Pudding for One

2 Tbsp Chocolate Bits
2 tsp sugar
2 tsp cornflour
½ cup milk

1. Into the dish or container you have chosen measure the Chocolate Bits.
2. Add the sugar and cornflour and stir to mix.
3. Add the milk and stir well.

4. Cook on Full power for 2 minutes.

Note: The time it takes to cook will depend on the temperature of the milk when you take it from the refrigerator. The warmer it is the faster it will boil. If you replace some of the milk with a higher fat mixture it will cook even faster.

5. After 1 minute, take out the pudding, stir and return to the oven. Don't worry if it doesn't look chocolatey at this stage. Just watch it carefully till it starts to bubble on top — before it starts to boil vigorously — then take it out and stir. The mixture gets smoother, thicker and darker as the chocolate finishes melting through the mixture.

6. You can serve the pudding as it is, or top with cream and chopped nuts, e.g. walnuts.

Variation: When the pudding is cool, but before it is cold, fold in ½ chopped banana. Decorate as desired.

Chocolate Pudding for Four

To make larger quantities, the recipe can be doubled or tripled and the cooking time NEARLY doubled or tripled accordingly. Prepare and cook the pudding in a microwave-proof bowl or a Pyrex measuring jug. To serve, transfer to individual dishes or a large serving bowl. To decorate see Garnishes and Decorations.

Peanutty Chocolate Pudding for One

2 Tbsp Chocolate Bits
2 tsp sugar
2 tsp cornflour
1 Tbsp peanut butter
½ cup milk
whipped cream
roasted peanuts, finely chopped

1. Mix together the Chocolate Bits, sugar and cornflour in the container.
2. Add the peanut butter and milk and stir to combine.
3. Cook on Full power for 2 minutes, stirring after 1 minute.
4. Leave to cool.
5. Top with whipped cream and chopped roasted peanuts.

Chocolate Cheesecake Pudding for One

2 Tbsp Chocolate Bits
2 tsp sugar
2 tsp cornflour
¼ cup milk
¼ cup cream cheese
raspberry purée (optional)

1. Mix together the Chocolate Bits, sugar and cornflour, stirring well.
2. Add the milk and cream cheese and stir well.
3. Cook on Full power for 1½-2 minutes, stirring well after 1 minute.
4. Leave to cool and top with fresh raspberry purée and whipped cream.
5. To make raspberry purée, mash ¼ cup fresh raspberries with a fork, but keep one or two whole to decorate the top of the pudding.

Garnishes and Decorations

You can make all the difference to a plain pudding-in-a-glass, by decorating it. It is worth taking a little time to make a pudding look more special. It helps if you keep, on hand, products that you can use for this purpose:

A can of Dairy Whip cream will go a long way, and keep in the refrigerator door for months, as long as you do not let enthusiastic children go crazy using it. The unsweetened variety can be used to garnish savoury foods, such as soups, too.

Small cartons of cream will keep in the refrigerator for weeks. A spoonful in the pudding will add variety and richness to it; a spoonful on top will look pretty. Choose from Dairy Cream, Double Cream, Crème Fraîche or Reduced Cream.

Keep a supply of garnishes which can be sprinkled onto dessert toppings:

- Hundreds and thousands — use with restraint for small children
- Chopped roasted nuts — peanuts, almonds, cashew nuts etc. Roast, toast or microwave your own and keep in airtight containers for crispness
- Toasted sesame seeds, ground with sugar, make a delicious topping. Grind them in a coffee and spice grinder attachment for a food processor or beater, or use a pestle and mortar.
- Sunflower seeds, toasted on a tray under the grill until they are a light golden colour, taste good, and cost much less than nuts.

Raw fruit, or drained cooked fruit, is always popular with pudding. Keep pieces small enough to be picked up with a spoonful of pudding. Suggestions include: peaches, pears, nectarines, raspberries, strawberries, passionfruit.

Middle Eastern Lamb Mini-Roast

Many of the foods grown and eaten regularly in Middle Eastern countries grow well in New Zealand too.

This dinner, which combines several Middle Eastern style dishes, makes a meal that is different and well seasoned, but not too highly spiced. It combines interesting flavours and textures. I have modified the recipes so that they can be prepared quickly and efficiently in a microwave oven.

This is a dinner which you should consider serving any time when shining purple aubergines (egg plants) are on sale at a reasonable price, usually from mid summer until late autumn. Of course you can prepare the main course at any time of the year, because we have first quality lamb and hogget available all the time.

Now that nearly half the families in New Zealand are one or two person units, small cuts of meat are becoming more available. Lamb carcasses are being cut with much more skill and efficiency, producing small, lean roasts that cook quickly and easily, and are suitable for microwaving.

The Aubergine Dip, Pita Bread Triangles and Kibbled Wheat will offer you no problems. You may want to experiment with several of the small lamb cuts to see how you like them cooked best. It is worth cooking a few variations, since once you find the way that suits you best, I am sure you will serve the lamb frequently.

MIDDLE EASTERN LAMB MINI-ROAST

Aubergine Dip
with
Pita Bread Triangles
or Poppadoms

Mini-Roast of Lamb

Kibbled Wheat

Tomato and Basil Salad

Fruit

Plan of Attack

1. Put the aubergine in the microwave oven to cook. During its cooking and standing time, prepare the dip ingredients. Add the hot, cubed aubergine to the dip and process till smooth.
2. Cook the kibbled wheat. It can easily be reheated or served cold.
3. Make the Pita Bread Triangles and cook them. Cook the poppadoms if they are being served with the dip.
4. Cook the mini-roast lamb. While it cooks and stands, you can make any additions you like to the kibbled wheat and make a salad to serve with the main course.

Mini-roast cuts of lamb are illustrated opposite below (left to right): (1) Rib-eye (2) Rack (3) Striploin (4) Thick flank (5) Rump (6) Topside (7) Silverside.



Mini-Roast of Lamb

Mini-roasts of lamb may be cut from many parts of the lamb carcass. They are a new idea, and you may find that your butcher does not routinely sell all of them. Butchers are helpful people, however, and as long as you ask about these cuts at a quiet time I am sure you will find your butcher will tell you about them, and will be able to produce some of them for you.

Working down the carcass from the front to the back, these mini-roasts are:

1. The **rib-eye** roast is cut from the muscles that run along the top of the upper ribs — the eye and the meaty part around it, that you see on a wide rib chop. It weighs about 270g and is not quite as lean as the meat from the other mini-roasts. Tie it at intervals for a compact shape. I like it best browned on its outer surfaces in a frypan, then microwaved at Medium (50% power) for about 8 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for about 5 minutes, but you should try it different ways, e.g. Full power for 5-6 minutes.

2. The **rack** is cut from the front part of the loin. It contains the rib bones — usually 6-8 of them. Chined, frenched and with the fat from its upper surface removed, it makes a superb roast. After coating, cook at Full power for 4-6 minutes, depending on its size and the number of chops.

3. The **striploin** is the large eye of meat from the middle loin. Weighing about 300g, it is very lean and must have the silvery coating on its outer side removed before cooking. After coating, cook on Medium (50% power) for 8 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for 5-6 minutes.

4. The **thick flank** or **knuckle** is the chunky muscle separated from the front side of the back leg after it is seam boned. Weighing 325-350g, it will serve 2. It may be coated or lightly browned in a pan before cooking. Microwave on Medium (50% power) for 8-10 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for 5-8 minutes, reducing times if outside is browned first.

5. The **boneless chump** or **rump** is the hip section, after its small bone and outer fat layer is removed. It weighs 225-250g and will serve 2 people. Tie for most compact shape. After coating, cook at Medium (50% power) for 10 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for about 8 minutes.

6. The **topside** is a larger, chunky roast removed from the inner side of the back of the leg after it is seam boned. It weighs about 350-470g, and will serve 2-3. It may be coated or lightly browned in a pan before cooking. Microwave at Medium (50% power) for about 8-10 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for 6-8 minutes, reducing times if the outside is browned first.

7. The **silverside** is a flatter piece, removed from the outer part of the back leg after seam boning, and weighs about 260g. It may need to be tied in a compact shape. Coat or brown before cooking at Medium (50% power) for 8-10 minutes or Medium-high (70% power) for about 6-8 minutes, using the shorter times if the surfaces are browned first.

For Middle Eastern flavour, brush the roasts with concentrated mint sauce mixed with liquid gravy browning. For an all-purpose coating, brush with a paste of fine-grain mixed mustard and dark soya sauce. Place roast on a microwave-proof rack or on a bread and butter plate inverted on a dinner plate.

The best way to judge when a mini roast is cooked is to feel it. If it still feels soft and spongy, like raw meat, it needs longer. If it feels firm and springy, it will be cooked. Always leave a mini-roast to stand, covered with foil or in a warm place, for about 5-10 minutes, before carving it. Do not reheat after carving.

To Warm Plates

Hot plates are important, especially for lamb. Between each plate put a wet paper towel and heat on Full power for ½-1 minute per plate, or until plates are hot.

Aubergine Dip

The microwave oven cooks aubergines quickly and without mess. Without a microwave the vegetable must be turned frequently under a grill or over a barbecue, or cooked in a very hot oven. As a bonus, microwaved aubergine flesh is pale green, rather than brownish grey. Season the dip carefully and I am sure you will find it delicious and popular.

You may have to hunt around to find tahini, which is a paste rather like peanut butter, made from ground toasted sesame seeds. Look in food specialty stores or delis, or in stores that stock Eastern foods. If you cannot find it, crush or pulverise ½ cup lightly toasted sesame seeds with 2 Tbsp oil, using a coffee and spice grinder or a pestle and mortar.

*1 small aubergine
1 large clove garlic, chopped
¼ cup parsley
2 Tbsp lemon juice
2 Tbsp tahini (sesame paste)
salt
pinch of cayenne pepper*

1. Cook whole aubergine until just tender. Trim the stem and puncture skin in several places. You can put the aubergine on a paper towel but I usually put in in a covered dish, because it drips a little liquid as it cooks, and it will cook faster in a covered dish.
2. Microwave on Full power, allowing about 5 minutes per 500g. Aubergine is cooked as soon as it feels soft all over. Allow 5 minutes' standing time. Remove dark skin and cut flesh into cubes.
3. In a food processor or bowl, mix together the garlic, parsley, lemon juice and tahini.
4. Process until finely chopped.
5. Add the hot aubergine and season to taste with salt and cayenne pepper.

6. Leave to stand for at least 1 hour for flavours to blend.

Variation: Make this dip leaving out the tahini if you cannot get it.

Pita Bread Triangles

Pita bread, pocket bread or Lebanese bread is flat bread that is made in rounds. The two layers should separate when heated, forming a pocket to hold any desired filling. Vacuum-packed or stale pita breads may not separate as desired — but any pita bread seems to make good toasted chips, which make wonderful “dippers”.

Brush or rub butter over each surface of the pita bread and cut into wedges. Put the wedges on a ridged surface (use a double layer of paper towels if you don't have a ridged dish) and cook on Full power for about 3 minutes, until the centre darkens slightly.

You may need to remove some before others — they cook fastest in the centre of the dish. They should be quite hard and crisp.

Variation: Sprinkle lightly with paprika if a more golden colour is desired. You can dip corn chips, potato chips or poppadoms if you don't have pita bread.

Poppadoms

1. Put 1 large or 2 small poppadoms, straight from their packet, on a paper towel.
2. Microwave, uncovered, on Full power for 45-60 seconds, until the whole surface buckles.
3. Remove poppadom before it browns and leave 30 seconds. The whole surface should be crisp when the poppadom is cooked. Adjust times, if necessary.

Kibbled Wheat

Kibbled wheat is made from wheat grains which have been chopped into smaller pieces. Burghul or bulgar is kibbled wheat which has been precooked, then dried again. You can use either product in this recipe but you will probably find it easier and cheaper to buy kibbled wheat.

You can cook and eat kibbled wheat as you would rice. It is good served hot, warm or at room temperature, plainly cooked or with added herbs and an oil and lemon dressing.

*1 cup kibbled wheat
2 tsp butter or oil
½ tsp salt
2¼ cups very hot water*

1. Put all the ingredients in a 2 litre microwave dish.
2. Cover loosely and cook at Full power for 12 minutes. Leave to stand for at least 5 minutes.

To serve hot, add chopped herbs when it is cooked.

To serve as a salad, add ½ cup finely chopped mint and parsley, the juice of ½ lemon and extra oil.

Tomato and Basil Salad

Slice or cube ripe red tomatoes. Sprinkle with chopped fresh basil leaves, a little salt and sugar, and freshly ground black pepper. If desired, add oil.

Winter Lamb Casserole Dinner

There are times when it is nice to be able to make a casserole which will not need any last minute fuss or additions. Lamb is my favourite meat for microwaved casseroles.

If you prepare a casserole like this, once it is underway, you can go out, or disappear to another part of the house, knowing that the microwave will turn itself off at the time you have set. The casserole will finish its cooking in the microwave and can be reheated when you want it.

If you prefer, remove the casserole so that it stands in a warm place, while you use the microwave oven to bake kumara (or cook rice) and to cook broccoli. Just before you sit down to dinner, you can put the Steamed Carrot Pudding, a spicy popular cold weather dessert, in to cook.

If you feel that it is complicated cooking everything in the microwave oven, you can cook broccoli or beans in a pan on the cook-top. (I think that green beans are better pan cooked than microwaved.)

For speed and ease, I like to serve an uncooked sauce with the carrot pudding. A small tub of reduced cream, mixed with apricot yoghurt, makes a delicious sauce that seems much richer than it is.

WINTER LAMB CASSEROLE DINNER

Winter Lamb Casserole

Rice or Baked Kumara

Broccoli or Beans

—————
Steamed Carrot Pudding
with
Apricot Cream Sauce

Plan of Attack

1. Prepare the Winter Lamb Casserole at least an hour and a half before you want to serve it. The flavour will be even better if it is cooked before it is needed and left to stand.
2. Scrub the kumara, prick and bake, or prepare and cook the rice.
3. If you are serving beans with this meal, prepare and put into a pan of salted boiling water on the cook-top. (Beans take longer than expected to cook in the microwave.) Or prepare and cook broccoli in the microwave oven.
4. While vegetables are cooking and the casserole standing, prepare the Steamed Carrot Pudding and Apricot Cream Sauce. The pudding can be put into the microwave just before you sit down to eat the main course. It will be cooked and will have stood long enough to serve straight away.



Winter Lamb Casserole

In this casserole the additions to the lamb add flavour and colour as well as thickening the sauce. Cubes of tender lamb in this sauce make it one of the nicest casseroles I make. Make sure that the meat is trimmed of nearly all visible fat before combining it with the other ingredients.

For 4-6 servings:

750g cubed shoulder lamb

¼ cup flour

2 tsp instant beef stock

1 tsp dry mustard

1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce

2 tsp dark soya sauce

1 onion, chopped

1 green pepper, chopped

1 red pepper, chopped

2 cups chopped tomatoes (or 1 cup tomato purée and 1 cup water)

about 10 drops hot pepper sauce

1. Trim lamb, removing fat.
2. Toss meat with dry ingredients, then add remaining ingredients.
3. Cook in large, covered microwave dish on Full power for 10 minutes, then stir and cook on Defrost (30% power) for 45 minutes or until meat is tender.

Rice

You don't save much time by cooking rice in a microwave oven, but you get an excellent product without any rinsing, draining, or scraping the bottom of the container. For best results, choose Basmati rice — it is well worth the extra price because it has such a delicious flavour.

1 cup Basmati or other long grain rice

2 tsp oil or butter

½ tsp salt

2¼ cups hot water

1. Put all the ingredients into a microwave dish and microwave, covered, on Full power for 12 minutes.
2. Leave to stand for 5-10 minutes. During this time the rice will soak up the rest of the water and finish cooking.
3. Fluff up with a fork. The rice doesn't need draining and never burns on the bottom.
4. Reheat if necessary.

Note: You can avoid the boiling-over problem, even at Full power, if you use a big enough, lidded, container — i.e. about 23cm in diameter, with fairly straight sides, and a 3-4 litre capacity — and you leave the lid ajar. Or you can use boiling water and cook the rice at Medium (50% power) for 15 minutes, or Defrost (30% power) for longer — about 20 minutes.

Baked Kumara

Kumara microwave very well, with times similar to those of potatoes the same weight. If you cannot find small kumara cook larger ones and slice them before serving. For a special treat, try whole split kumara or kumara slices topped with sour cream, reduced cream, yoghurt or crème fraîche and a sprinkling of brown sugar.

1. Scrub evenly-shaped kumara well. Cut off any stringy ends.
2. Prick in several places.
3. Microwave on Full power allowing 3 minutes per 100g, turning over after half the estimated cooking time. Cook until kumara give when pressed.
4. Leave to stand for 3-4 minutes.
5. Cut a cross in the tops and press between the cuts. Serve with sour cream and chives, or with sour cream mixed with brown sugar in proportions to taste, e.g. 1 tsp brown sugar to 2 Tbsp sour cream.

To Warm Plates

Hot plates are important, especially for lamb. Between each plate put a wet paper towel and heat on Full power for ½-1 minute per plate, or until plates are hot.

Broccoli

Broccoli is one of my favourite microwaved vegetables. Allow 125-150g per serving.

1. For best results, cut the flowerbud heads into even pieces, peel off and discard the tough skin on the stalk, starting at the base of the stem, then cut the stems into pieces the same size as the tops. (Unpeeled broccoli overcooks before stems become tender.)
2. Add 2 tsp water per serving.
3. Cook on Full power. Allow
 - 1 serving — 1 ½ minutes
 - 2 servings — 2 ½ minutes
 - 4 servings — 4 minutes
4. Allow 2 minutes' standing time. Toss with butter.

Green Beans

If you choose to cook beans in the microwave, add ½ cup water to 500g sliced beans. Cook on Full power for 8-15 minutes, depending on their age. Stir at intervals.

Steamed Carrot Pudding

If by any chance all your Steamed Carrot Pudding does not get eaten while it is hot, slice it and butter it as you would a fruit loaf. The grated carrot added to the mixture keeps it nice and moist for some time after it is cooked. Because the mixture is soft, the pudding tends to break when turned out of its ring pan unless you take extra precautions. The best precaution is to spray the ring pan lightly with non-stick spray, then to line the bottom with a Teflon liner especially shaped for ring pans.

Note: Remember to retrieve the Teflon liner after use. It can be used many times, but it is easy for someone who doesn't know this to throw it out when clearing up after the meal.

For 6 servings:

100g butter
2 cups finely grated carrot
1 egg
1 cup brown sugar
1 cup flour
¼ tsp baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp mixed spice
½ cup sultanas

1. Melt butter in a mixing bowl on Full power for about 1 ½ minutes.
2. Stir in carrots, egg and sugar.
3. Sift in dry ingredients and add sultanas. Stir until just mixed. The thickness of the mixture depends on the carrots. If very thin, stir in ¼ cup flour. The final mixture should be thinner than a butter cake mixture.
4. Pour into a small ring mould that has been lightly sprayed with non-stick spray and the bottom lined with a Teflon liner. Cover with a lid or plastic cling wrap.
5. Microwave on Full power for 7 minutes. Leave to stand for 2 minutes, then unmould.

Apricot Cream Sauce

This sauce seems deliciously rich although it is made from a low-fat cream, mixed with low-fat yoghurt. If you find it too thick, thin it down with milk.

A little orange rind, grated over it, looks pretty if you are serving the pudding for a special occasion.

I use equal parts of reduced fat cream and apricot-flavoured yoghurt — use proportions to suit yourself.

“Grilled” Steak, Tipsy Cake

Most of us, when we come into the kitchen to prepare a meal, have one idea uppermost in our minds. How can we prepare and cook the food efficiently, well and as quickly as possible, so that we can get on with the rest of our lives.

I seldom say to myself, “Tonight I will cook everything in the microwave oven.” Instead, I work out what I will save most time microwaving, and what else will cook on the cook-top while the microwave oven is in use. I’m sure you will want to do the same with this menu — cooking either the steak or potatoes on the cook-top.

However, I am including instructions for microwaving both of these foods, in case you want to change the menu slightly and cook something else on the cook-top — or in case you don’t **have** a cook-top available.

You get best results microwaving steak if you use a browning dish, which works efficiently and well. It does take a few minutes to heat up the dish, but of course you can get on with other things while the dish is heating up.

It is important to watch the timing carefully. In the same way that steak toughens if overcooked in a pan, or under a grill, it toughens if overcooked in a microwave oven — but faster — since microwaving is such a fast method of cooking.

Golden Potatoes are the closest things to chips that I microwave. The coating on the cubes of potato add flavour and colour to the sides of the cubes that do not brown.

Mushrooms microwave very fast. In their slightly thickened sauce they make a good accompaniment to the steak.

You can cook the pepper ~~at~~ ^{to} the stage you like it — I think it is nicest if the peppers are hot through, but still crunchy. If you cook them for a long time they will lose their brilliant colour.

“GRILLED” STEAK, TIPSY CAKE

Tender Beef Steak

Garlic Mushrooms

Golden Potatoes

Sesame Peppers

—
Tipsy Cake

Tipsy Cake is based on a cake made from a packet mix. If you keep a few mixes in your cupboard you can “whisk up a cake” in less than ten minutes.

Although there is no reason why you can’t serve your freshly made cake exactly as it is, you will make it look as if you have spent all day in the kitchen if you leave the cake to macerate (or soak) in a fruit and rum-flavoured syrup.

Plan of Attack

1. Make the Tipsy Cake first. It needs time to soak in its rum-flavoured syrup. The cake may be made not long before serving but the syrup soaks through more evenly if left to stand for several hours.
2. Prepare and soak the Sesame Peppers. They can be reheated just before serving.
3. The Garlic Mushrooms may be prepared and cooked next and also reheated just before taking to the table.
4. Prepare the marinade for the steaks. Leave steaks to marinate for at least 10 minutes.
5. Scrub or peel the potatoes and cut into cubes. Coat with the dry ingredients.
6. Decide whether to cook the steak or the potatoes in the microwave oven then, following the manufacturer’s instructions, heat the browning dish in the oven.
7. Add either the steak or the potatoes to the browning dish and while this cooks, cook either the potatoes or the steak on the cook-top.
8. Should you choose to cook both in the microwave oven, cook the potatoes first, reheat the browning dish and then cook the steak. It takes tight timing and some juggling to cook both, one after another, in the microwave. Remember to reheat the peppers and mushrooms before serving.



Tender Beef Steak

Steak browned on a microwave browning dish looks just like steak cooked in a hot pan. For even better colour (also flavour and tenderness), marinate it first. Even if the steak is left to marinate only while the browning dish is heating up, you will notice the difference.

It is really important to put the steak in the preheated dish before it cools down, so you should make a point of getting your timing just right!

2 servings:

2 fillet steaks or 1 ribeye or 1 sirloin steak

Marinade:

1-2 cloves garlic, crushed

equal parts of dark soya sauce, oil and orange or lemon juice

1. Prepare marinade, turn steaks in it and leave for 5-60 minutes.
2. Heat the browning dish following the manufacturer's instructions.
3. Have the meat at room temperature. Lay the steaks on the hot browning dish.
4. Microwave on Full power for 1 minute. Turn and cook for another minute.
5. Leave to stand for 2-3 minutes.
6. Take the steak out of the browning dish, then add 1-2 Tbsp wine or vegetable oil, scrape the bits from the dish and heat for 1-2 minutes until the volume is reduced to half. Swirl in $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp butter and pour the sauce over the steak.

Note: For 2 larger steaks, you need to cook them for about 2 minutes on each side. The precise times will depend on your own preference, but just like steaks cooked by other methods, if you overcook them you toughen them.

Garlic Mushrooms

Mushrooms microwave very fast. If you overcook them they will be shrunken and soft, and produce a lot of extra liquid — so take care with your timing. Use a lightly thickened glaze for extra colour and flavour.

2 servings:

200g mushrooms

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

1½ tsp butter

½ tsp light soya sauce

½ tsp cornflour

1 Tbsp chopped parsley or spring onion

pepper

1. Wipe mushrooms and halve, or slice if large.
2. Put garlic and butter in a casserole just large enough to hold mushrooms.
3. Heat on Full power for 30 seconds or until butter has melted.
4. Stir in soya sauce and cornflour then sprinkle with parsley or spring onion. Toss mushrooms in this mixture, coating them evenly and lightly.
5. Cover loosely and microwave on Full power for 3-4 minutes or until mushrooms have softened to the desired degree and are coated with lightly thickened sauce. Sprinkle with pepper.
6. Serve with steak.

Golden Potatoes

These are cooked in a preheated browning dish for a crispy surface. They owe their good colour to their coating ingredients. It pays to pat the cubed potatoes dry before you coat them and tip them into the very hot dish or frypan.

2 servings:

2 medium potatoes

1 Tbsp flour

½-1 tsp salt

1 tsp paprika

½ tsp curry powder

1 Tbsp butter or oil

1. Preheat browning dish for 6 minutes.
2. Scrub or peel potatoes. Cut into small (1cm) cubes, leave to stand in a bowl of water for a few minutes then drain and pat dry.
3. Shake in a plastic bag with the next four ingredients, to coat evenly.
4. Add butter to heated browning dish. Quickly spread coated potatoes on hot buttered surface.
5. Microwave on Full power for 3 minutes. Turn. Cook 2-3 minutes longer, or until tender.

Note: If the potatoes are cooked in a frypan on the cook-top turn frequently to prevent sticking. Cook until golden and potatoes tender.

Sesame Peppers

Peppers add colour and crunch to this menu. Cut them into strips or slices and cook them to the degree you like them. Red and golden yellow peppers tend to have a sweeter flavour than green peppers, so include them in pepper dishes for extra flavour, as well as colour.

2-4 servings:

1 Tbsp corn or soya oil
1 clove garlic, chopped
½ tsp sesame oil
½ tsp light soya sauce
1 green pepper, sliced
1 red or yellow pepper, sliced
½ tsp cornflour (optional)
pinch sugar
1 Tbsp toasted sesame seeds

1. Combine the first six ingredients in a medium-sized, covered casserole.
2. Microwave on Full power for 3-4 minutes, until tender-crisp.
3. Thicken liquid with cornflour if desired, add sugar and cook 1 minute longer.
4. Sprinkle with sesame seeds before serving.

Toasted Sesame Seeds

1 Tbsp butter
¼ cup sesame seeds

1. Microwave butter in a small dish on Full power for 40 seconds or until melted.
2. Add sesame seeds, microwave stirring each minute until the seeds are light brown. Seeds in centre of dish brown first.
3. Drain on a paper towel.

Tipsy Cake

This cake is based on a microwave cake mix. You can use any brand of cake mix, of any flavour that you feel would be suitable. My favourite is a light chocolate ring cake. If I use a mix which has a packet of icing enclosed, I save this to use on another (non-packet) cake at a later time.

Although the amount of syrup may seem too much for your cake to absorb, you will find that it is soaked up surprisingly fast. I often serve this cake very soon after making it — but the syrup soaks through more evenly if the cake is left to stand for several hours, or even days.

1 pkt microwave cake mix (any flavour)

Syrup:

¼ cup jam — raspberry, strawberry or blackcurrant
¼ cup liquid (½ cup water and ¼ cup orange concentrate)
¼ cup rum (or a few drops of rum essence)
fresh or frozen fruit

1. Make the cake first. Read the instructions on the packet and follow them to the letter. I put a paper towel over the surface of the cake as it seems to make the cake cook more evenly with a drier top (no wet patches).
2. Cook on Full power for 6-7 minutes. The cake is cooked when it looks cooked near the ring and starts to come away from the edges. Stand for a few minutes before turning out.
3. In a microwave-proof bowl or jug, put the jam and orange juice and stir to combine. Heat on Full power until the liquid boils.
4. Add the rum, or rum essence.
5. Spoon the hot syrup over the hot cake. Keep spooning it over the top until most of it is absorbed. If it will soak up more, heat a little extra syrup.
6. Decorate the cake with fresh fruit to serve.

To Warm Plates

Put wet paper towels between plates. Heat the pile of plates and wet towels on Full power until the plates are hot, allowing ½-1 minute per plate.

Chicken Fricassee Dinner

I have planned this menu to show you that it is a good idea to think ahead at times when you are cooking — to cook twice as much as you need for one meal.

For this meal, the main course, Chicken Fricassee, is made with cooked chicken, and the dessert with crêpes from the freezer and apples dried in the autumn.

When I have decided to cook chicken, I often choose a bird big enough to serve for two meals. My chicken fricassee is the second half of a Grand Poulet which has been cooked in an oven bag.

The microwave does a wonderful job of reheating cooked chicken — you will find it very tender, and full of flavour — as long as you do not overheat and toughen it.

If you want to make Chicken Fricassee and you haven't leftover cooked chicken, you have another option — buy a chicken that has been cooked for you. Chicken Fricassee made from a cooked, smoked chicken has a slightly different (pinkish) colour and an exciting flavour. A smoked chicken is very solid and compact, so you may find that you will use only part of it for your fricassee. I'm sure you will have no trouble thinking of other ways to use the rest.

In our house, I nearly always mix up a double batch of crêpe batter. The food processor makes light work of the task, and the batter does not spoil on standing. The crêpes not needed immediately are frozen in a stack with a piece of plastic film between each for easy removal later.

These crêpes thaw very quickly at a low power level and make elegant containers for different fruit mixtures.

CHICKEN FRICASSEE DINNER

Chicken Fricassee

Mashed Potato or Rice

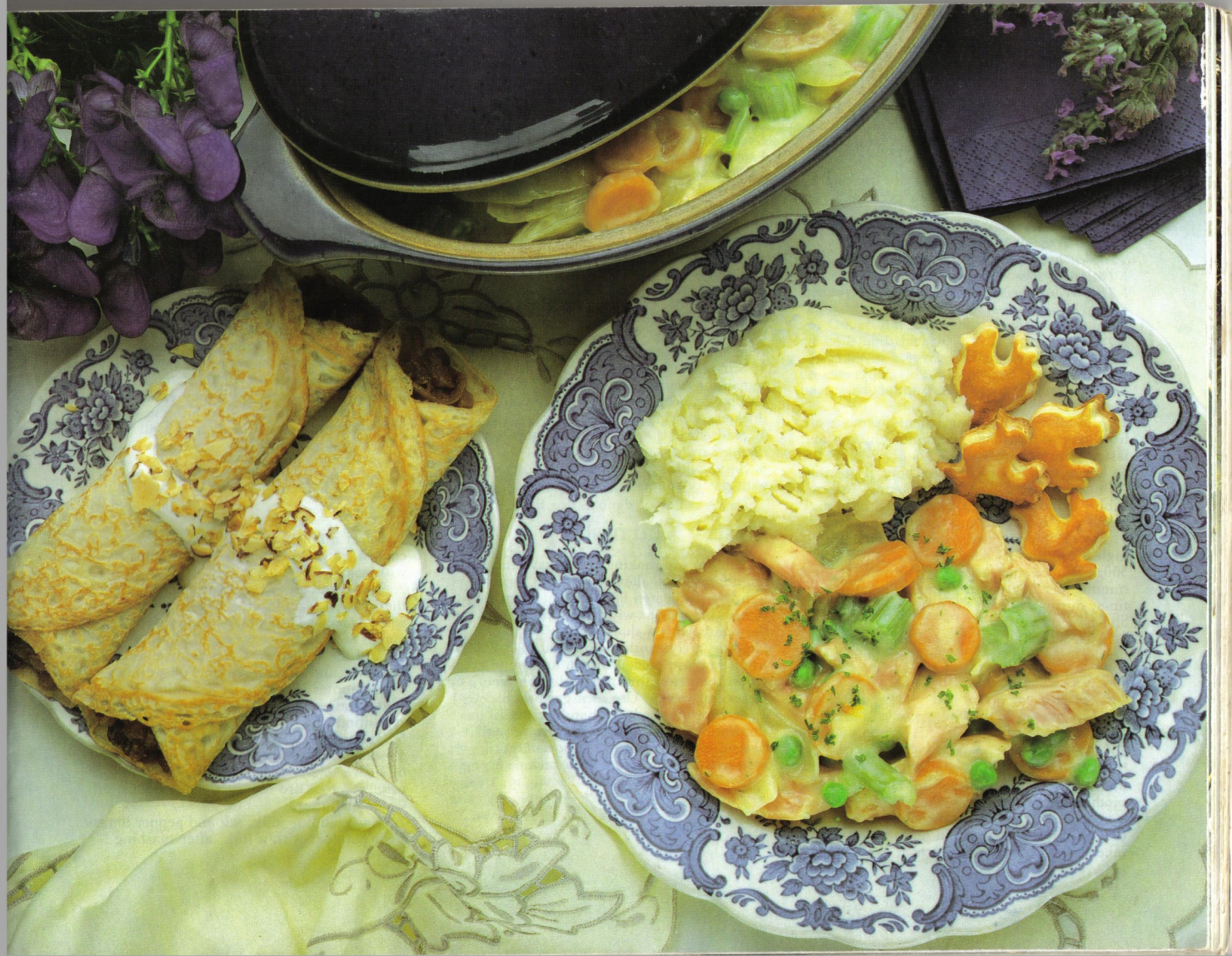
Spiced Apple Crêpes

You can make a spiced apple filling in a very short time in the microwave oven, whether you use apples which you have dried yourself (in a dehydrator) or which you have bought. This filling keeps for several days in the refrigerator, or for several weeks in the freezer. Again, the microwave makes short work of heating it.

Practise cooking potatoes for mashing in your microwave oven. Once you have perfected the technique, you will find it saves you mess, time and potato!

Plan of Attack

1. In conjunction with the preparation of meals on previous days.
 - a) cook the bagged roast chicken
 - b) prepare, cook and freeze the crêpes
 - c) dry the apples (or buy dried apple)
 - d) prepare pastry shapes from pie trimmings
2. Remove crêpes from freezer and thaw them in microwave oven.
3. Prepare and cook the spiced apple filling.
4. Assemble the filled crêpes ready for reheating later.
5. Prepare and cook the potatoes or cook the rice.
6. Make and cook the Chicken Fricassee.
7. While it cooks, mash the potatoes.
8. Freshen the pastry garnish if desired.
9. Warm the crêpes in the microwave or pan while eating the first course.



Bagged Roast Chicken

The cooked meat from half a large chicken (about 2 cups) will make four servings of Chicken Fricassee. When you are cooking a whole chicken, bag it for most even cooking.

For about 8 servings:

*1 Grand Poulet (about 2kg)
¼ cup chopped fresh herbs
1 Tbsp dark soya sauce
1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 Tbsp smooth mixed mustard
1 Tbsp lemon juice
1 Tbsp butter
1 clove garlic, crushed*

1. Put Grand Poulet in an unpunctured oven bag.
2. Add all remaining ingredients, remove air from bag so marinade surrounds chicken and fasten with a rubber band.
3. Leave to stand for half an hour if possible, turning occasionally. Before cooking, loosen rubber band, leaving a finger-sized hole so steam can escape during cooking.
4. For preference, microwave on Medium-high (70% power) allowing 10 minutes per 500g. If necessary, roast on Full power, for 8 minutes per 500g. Turn chicken several times during cooking for most even results and best colour.
5. After standing for 10 minutes, the flesh between leg and breast should no longer look pink and the juice should run clear.

Chicken Fricassee

Chicken Fricassee is made by cooking a good selection of vegetables in a buttery cooking liquid, then adding thickening and liquid to produce a smooth creamy sauce. When the sauce is cooked, and of exactly the right consistency, cooked chicken is stirred in and the fricassee is reheated just enough to warm it evenly.

4 servings:

*200g carrots, thinly sliced
1 cup sliced celery
4 small onions, quartered
50g butter
¾ cup water
2 Tbsp flour
1 tsp instant green herb stock
1 cup milk
½-1 cup peas
2 cups cubed chicken, cooked or smoked*

1. Put carrots, celery, onions, butter and ¼ cup water in a covered casserole.
2. Cook on Full power for 8 minutes until vegetables are tender.
3. Stir in flour, instant stock, milk and remaining water. Add the peas.
4. Cook, uncovered, until sauce boils and thickens, stirring every minute.
5. Add chicken and heat 2 minutes longer, taking care not to boil it.
6. Serve with mashed potatoes and garnish with pastry shapes.

Pastry Garnish

When you are making a pie, save the pastry trimmings. Roll them out thinly, brush lightly with beaten egg and cut them into interesting shapes with small cutters, or into diamonds with a sharp knife.

Cook in a conventional oven at 190°-200°C until they are golden brown and quite crisp. Cool, then store in an airtight container, up to several weeks. Use as a garnish. If necessary refresh by standing the decorations on a folded paper towel and heating on Medium (50% power) until warmed through. Cool on a rack.

Mashed Potato

There are several important points to remember when you are microwaving potatoes for mashing. You can get an excellent result after a short cooking time as long as you follow these guidelines carefully.

1. Cut the peeled potatoes into evenly sized pieces.
2. Use a cooking container with a central insert (the potatoes in the centre of a solid dish cook more slowly).
3. Cook until potatoes are just tender then leave them to stand before you mash them.
4. Do not overcook them. Overcooked potatoes are shrunken and will not mash well.
5. Mash with a potato masher, then beat the potatoes with a fork, until they are creamy.

4 servings:

*4 medium-large potatoes
¼ cup water
1 Tbsp butter
milk
salt and pepper*

1. Select a bowl in which the potatoes can be cooked, mashed and served. Half fill bowl with cold water.
2. Peel potatoes, cut them in half length-wise, then cut each half into 4-6 fairly even, fairly square pieces. Drop potatoes into bowl of water and as soon as all are prepared, drain off water.
3. Add the measured water and butter.
4. Cover and microwave on Full power for 7-10 minutes. Shake after 4-5 minutes, to coat potatoes with melted butter and to reposition.
5. Test with sharp knife removing potatoes as soon as centre cubes are tender.
6. Leave to stand, covered, 4-5 minutes, or until potatoes are required. Don't drain off water or butter.
7. Mash, adding milk, salt and pepper to taste. Beat potatoes with a fork, after mashing.

Spiced Apple Crêpes

1. Use freshly made, or thawed frozen crêpes. Place one crêpe at a time on a board.
2. Either spread several spoonfuls of filling evenly over the whole surface, or place it in a line down the centre.
3. Roll up the filled crêpe, and place on a lightly buttered shallow microwave dish.
4. Cover with plastic film and microwave until warmed through.
5. Serve warm, with a sprinkling of lightly toasted slivered almonds or a dusting of icing sugar, and whipped cream, if desired.

Variation: Place a spoonful of filling in the middle of each crêpe. Fold over the sides to make square packages. Place the packages, smooth side up, in a lightly buttered pan. Brown lightly, then turn and brown the tops. Serve warm, with sour cream or crème fraîche.

Crêpes

The recipe may be doubled so that you can have some extra frozen crêpes on hand. These thin, delicate, tender pancakes may be made ahead and refrigerated or frozen till required. Allowing for a few experimental failures, this recipe makes 8 crêpes, using 2 Tbsp ($\frac{1}{8}$ cup) of batter for each crêpe.

*2 eggs
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt*

1. Combine ingredients in order given, in a food processor or blender. If mixing in a bowl, add egg then milk to dry ingredients and beat till smooth.

2. Pour a measured quantity (e.g. 2 Tbsp) into a smooth, sprayed or buttered, preheated pan.
3. Immediately tilt the pan so the batter covers the bottom in a thin film. If the batter does not spread thinly, add more milk to thin batter down before making the next crêpe. Do not worry if crêpes are not evenly shaped circles.
4. When the batter no longer looks wet in the centre, ease the edges of the crêpe from the pan. Turn carefully. Dry the second-side, without necessarily browning it.
5. Stack the crêpes until required. Place them on a plate in a plastic bag to prevent drying out.

To Freeze Crêpes

Stack crêpes on a piece of cardboard, with plastic film between each crêpe for easy removal later. Slide the stack of crêpes into a plastic bag, remove air from bag and seal with a rubber band.

These crêpes thaw very quickly when required. Microwave on Full power for 4-5 seconds per crêpe or until soft enough to roll easily.

Spiced Apple Filling

This filling keeps for some days in the refrigerator, and is delicious used in pastry slices and pies, or as a filling for crêpes. Commercially-dried apple or dried pears can be used if you do not have your own dried apples available.

*100g dried apple
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sultanas or currants
1 cup wine or orange juice or water
2-3 Tbsp brown sugar
1½ tsp cornflour
1 tsp cinnamon
about 1 tsp grated nutmeg
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp ground cloves
2 Tbsp butter*

1. Put the dried apple and sultana or currants in a microwave dish.
2. Measure the liquid, using wine, juice or water, or a mixture of two or three of them. (Diluted bottled concentrated orange juice mixtures give a good flavour.) Add to dried fruit.
3. Cover and microwave for 3-5 minutes, on Full power, or until the fruit is tender.
4. Mix all the ingredients together, stirring well so that there are no lumps. Sprinkle over the plumped, cooked fruit, then stir evenly through it.
5. Add the butter.
6. Cover and microwave mixture again until it boils and thickens.
7. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator, thinning the mixture, if it looks dry, with more fruit juice, wine, sherry, brandy or rum.

To Prepare Dehydrated Apple

Dehydrating is by far the easiest way to preserve apples. Fit the food processor with a blade which cuts pieces rather like small french fries.

1. Cut unpeeled, cored apples into large chunks with a knife and process.
2. Transfer apples to a bowl of diluted lemon juice, and leave to stand for 15 minutes or so, before draining them in a large sieve.
3. Spread apples on trays of the dehydrator, stack trays, put the machine in an airy, well ventilated place, and leave, set to 55°C, for 8-10 hours, until the fruit is pliable and dry, without being sticky. (It costs about 35 cents to run the dehydrator for this time.)
4. Put the dried apple into little plastic bags and seal bags with rubber bands.

Spring Chicken Breast Dinner

When you have a microwave oven in your kitchen, you will find that your meal preparation time is reduced, burnt pots are a thing of the past, and your food tastes especially good because you have not lost any flavour by throwing out cooking liquids. You will also find that you can cook delicate, tender foods more evenly, so they do not dry out. The Stuffed Chicken Breasts in this menu illustrate this point very well. It is hard to cook them as evenly by any other method.

New potatoes and asparagus are wonderful spring vegetables. They will be full of flavour when microwaved.

If there are no fresh raspberries available when you are preparing this meal, make the sauce with frozen ones. The colour and flavour will be very good, whichever you use.

When you cook beaten egg whites and sugar in a conventional oven, you get a pavlova with a crisp outside and, hopefully, a marshmallow centre. In the microwave oven, no crisp crust forms, but the marshmallow centre is so fast and easy to cook, you can make and serve it at times when you would not dream of making a conventional pavlova. If you can't accept this modification, serve the sauce over ice cream instead — it will still be good.

SPRING CHICKEN BREAST DINNER

Stuffed Chicken Breasts

New Potatoes

Asparagus and Hollandaise Sauce

Marshmallow Pavlova

or

Ice Cream
and
Raspberry Sauce

Plan of Attack

1. Start by preparing the dessert. The Raspberry Sauce is served at room temperature and the Pavlova cold, so make these first.
2. Prepare the Savoury Crumbs for the Stuffed Chicken Breasts and stuff and coat the chicken breasts so they are ready to cook. Prepare them ahead if you like. Put them on to cook 25 minutes before you want to eat.
3. Prepare the new potatoes while the chicken cooks. Put them on to cook as soon as the chicken comes out of the oven.
4. When the potatoes are cooked, put the Hollandaise Sauce on to cook or make a packaged sauce mix.
5. Prepare and cook the asparagus. If you feel that you have too tight a timetable, cook the new potatoes or asparagus on your cook-top.



Savoury Crumbs

These easy-to-make crumbs are well coloured, crisp and are excellent for coating microwaved food to make it appear as though it has been cooked conventionally.

1 Tbsp butter
2 cups fresh breadcrumbs
1-2 Tbsp chopped parsley or other fresh herbs
(optional)

1. Melt the butter in a flat-bottomed microwave dish, 20-30cm diameter, on Full power for about 30 seconds.
2. Stir in the crumbs, made from stale bread, and the herbs.
3. Microwave, uncovered, on Full power, for 2-4 minutes until the crumbs brown, stirring often once the crumbs change colour.

Note: The crumbs in the centre of the dish usually brown first. Crumbs become crisp and crunchy when cold.

Stuffed Chicken Breasts

Tender chicken breast meat microwaves very well. The tasty stuffing keeps the meat very moist, as well as adding flavour. The crumb coating disguises the fact that chicken breasts cook so quickly that they do not brown. This recipe must be prepared in three stages. First, make the savoury crumbs. Next, make the stuffing. When both of these are ready for use, prepare the chicken breasts using the stuffing and coating. You must handle the tender, skinless breasts very carefully. After they are rolled, hold them together with skewers, string or rubber bands — whichever you find easiest. Remove them before you serve the breasts.

For family service you can leave each breast whole. For more elegant service, slice each breast, and overlap the slices on each plate.

4 servings:
4 boneless and skinless chicken breasts
50g butter
1 rasher bacon, chopped
½ cup finely chopped mushrooms
1 Tbsp soft breadcrumbs
¼ cup flour
1 egg, beaten

1. Make Savoury Crumbs.
2. Put each boneless, skinless breast between two pieces of plastic (or two plastic bags). Using a rolling pin, bang evenly and gently until each breast is double its original length and width. Lift carefully from the plastic.
3. Melt butter in a small container.
4. Add 1 Tbsp of the melted butter to the bacon, mushrooms and soft breadcrumbs and mix.
5. Cover and cook on Full power for 3 minutes, stirring or shaking after 1 minute.
6. Put a pile of stuffing on the inner side of each breast. Roll up and secure with toothpicks.
7. Dust lightly with flour, then turn, first in beaten egg to coat, then in the Savoury Crumbs.
8. Arrange breasts in a circle on a flat dish. Pour remaining melted butter over them and bake, uncovered, on Full power for 8 minutes. Stand 2-3 minutes before serving, or slicing.

New Potatoes

New potatoes cook beautifully in a microwave oven.

1. Scrub potatoes, scraping them if desired. Halve or quarter large potatoes, or peel a ring of skin from around the middle of small whole potatoes.
 2. Drop into cold water as they are prepared, to stop them browning.
 3. Just before cooking, transfer to a microwave casserole, or oven bag.
 4. For each serving add 1 Tbsp water, 1 mint sprig and ½ tsp butter.
 5. Cover or close bag loosely with a rubber band.
- Approximate cooking times on Full power:
- 1 serving (100-125g) — 2½ minutes
 - 2 servings (200-250g) — 3½-4 minutes
 - 4 servings (about 500g) — 6-7 minutes
6. Shake casserole or turn bag half way through cooking time.
 7. Potatoes are cooked when barely tender. Allow standing time of 3-4 minutes.

Asparagus

Choose good quality spears of asparagus of even thickness. Fat spears cook better than very thin ones. Snap off and discard the bottoms of the stems. For best results and most even cooking, peel the outside skin off the lower part of the stems using a potato peeler or sharp knife.

1. Use an oven bag for a few servings, and a covered casserole for more. The asparagus should almost fill the cooking container.
2. Add 1-2 tsp water per serving.
3. Fold or fasten bag with rubber band, leaving a finger-sized hole for steam to escape.
4. Microwave on Full power. 10 medium stalks take about 2 minutes. 500g asparagus takes 4-5 minutes.
5. Allow about 2 minutes' standing time.

Note: Do not overcook. Asparagus should be bright green and slightly crunchy. Serve plain or with butter or hollandaise sauce.

Hollandaise Sauce (from a mix)

These days, more and more semi-prepared foods have microwave instructions on them. Packet Hollandaise Sauce, made in a microwave like most sauces, seems to be creamier than its conventionally cooked counterpart. This is lower in calories than hollandaise sauce 'made from scratch'. It is delicious with the asparagus and chicken. Follow instructions precisely.

Hollandaise Sauce

For 4 servings:

*100g butter
2 egg yolks
1 Tbsp lemon juice*

1. Heat the butter in a 2 cup measuring cup, covered with a saucer to stop splatters, on Full power for 3 minutes.
2. In a fairly small bowl with a rounded bottom beat the egg yolks with a whisk until well mixed.
3. Add the hot butter to the egg yolks in a thin stream, whisking all the time. (Do not add the butter sediment, i.e. stop after about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the butter is added.) The sauce should thicken as the hot butter is added.
4. Whisk the lemon juice into the thickened sauce. This may thin the sauce considerably. If sauce needs further thickening microwave on Defrost (30% power) for 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, whisking after each 30 seconds. Stop as soon as sauce thickens round edge.
5. Whisk to make sauce smooth.
6. Serve sauce warm, not hot, warming carefully on Defrost (30% power) for short intervals if necessary.

Marshmallow Pavlova

This does not have the crisp crust of an oven-baked pavlova, but it has the advantage of being beaten, shaped and cooked in ten minutes. I like to top my pavlova with plenty of lightly toasted slivered almonds. These add colour and crunch and taste good with fruit.

*4 egg whites
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
1 cup caster sugar
1 tsp wine vinegar
1 tsp vanilla
 $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup toasted slivered almonds*

1. In electric mixer, beat egg whites with salt until soft peaks form.
2. Add the sugar gradually and continue beating for 2-3 minutes.
3. Fold in the vinegar and vanilla.
4. Pile meringue onto a flat plate and stand this on an inverted plate in the microwave oven.
5. Cook on Full power for 3 minutes.
6. Leave to cool in the oven with the door ajar.
7. Serve in wedges, with Raspberry Sauce.

Note: (a) Pavlova may split while baking. Splits close on standing. (b) Some syrup will leak from pavlova on standing.

Raspberry Sauce

This is a brightly coloured sauce with a sharpness that goes well with pavlova or with ice cream. You can use free-flow frozen raspberries without thawing them first. If you have berries which are frozen in a block, thaw them enough to cut as much as you need, then cut or break this into smaller pieces.

*$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
1 Tbsp custard powder or cornflour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water or white wine
2 cups fresh or frozen raspberries
2-3 Tbsp rum or brandy (optional)*

1. In a small bowl or jug mix the sugar with the custard powder or cornflour.
2. Stir in the liquid and microwave on Full power for 2 minutes until it boils and has thickened.
3. Stir, then leave to stand for 1-2 minutes. Stir in the thawed or fresh raspberries. Add flavouring, if desired, and cover while sauce cools.
4. Serve warm or cold, with ice cream or marshmallow pavlova.

Tangy Pork Fillet Dinner

It is a good feeling to know that you have some special recipes in your cooking repertoire, so that you can cook an impressively tasty and attractive meal for a friend.

It is better still if you do this in a short time, with the minimum of fuss and mess.

You can serve the main course of this meal, from scratch, less than half an hour after you come in the door, if you like. On the other hand, if you want to spend as little time in the kitchen as possible, you can plan ahead and impress your guests by producing this meal after spending only 10 minutes or so popping things in and out of your microwave oven.

The recipes used in the main course are modifications of Chinese favourites of mine. The microwave oven not only simplifies their preparation, but ensures that the rice is beautifully light and fluffy, the pork fillet is amazingly tender and the sauce colourful, tangy and of good consistency. The vegetables may be cooked just as you like them, but I hope you will try them while they are tender-crisp, with maximum colour. One of the reasons that all the food in the main course tastes so good is that no cooking or marinating liquids are thrown out — so no flavour or nutrients are lost.

If you like a slice of cake to serve with tea or coffee, you will find this banana cake, made with a mixture of wholemeal and plain flour, is easy and popular. Make different icings for it on different occasions. A food processor and microwave oven make icings, and cakes, so easy.

TANGY PORK FILLET DINNER

Marinated Pork Fillet
in
Tangy Plum Sauce

Rice

Stir-Fried Green Vegetables

Iced Banana Cake

Coffee

Plan of Attack

1. Make the Iced Banana Cake first. It will need 3-4 minutes' standing time before it is turned out to cool, and once cold it can be iced. Mix, cook it and leave it to stand.
2. While the banana cake is cooking, prepare the pork fillet so it can marinate for at least 10 minutes for extra flavour.
3. Put the rice on to cook as soon as the cake comes out of the microwave oven. Rice needs standing time and is easy to reheat when it suits you.
4. Next, make the chocolate icing for your banana cake.
5. Measure the Tangy Plum Sauce ingredients in a separate bowl.
6. Prepare the vegetables. (When you have got to this stage, you have everything organised and can sit and relax!)
7. Then, back to the kitchen. Reheat the rice for a few minutes and while it reheats, put the cake on its serving plate and ice it.
8. Cook the marinated pork fillets. When it is cooked, cook the sauce and stir the cooked meat into the cooked sauce.
9. Put the vegetables in to cook while you serve the meat and rice.



Marinated Pork Fillet in Tangy Plum Sauce

This recipe is one of my favourites. The meat is very tender and in its sweet and sour sauce everyone seems to like it.

For 2-3 servings:

*1 pork fillet (250-350g)
1 tsp dark soya sauce
1 tsp sesame oil
1 tsp sherry
1 clove garlic, finely chopped*

Sauce:

*2 tsp cornflour
1 tsp instant green herb stock
2 tsp dark soya sauce
¼ cup plum jam
¼ cup dry sherry
½ cup water
1 clove garlic, finely chopped*

1. Cut fillet into pieces about 5mm thick.
2. Mix with soya sauce, sesame oil, sherry and garlic. Leave to stand for at least 10 minutes.
3. Cover and microwave on Full power for 2-4 minutes, stirring after each minute until meat loses its pinkness (fillet can overcook in a very short time).
4. In another bowl combine sauce ingredients.
5. Microwave, covered, on Full power for about 2 minutes, stirring occasionally, until smooth and clear.
6. Stir meat into cooked sauce and spoon over rice. The meat will be best if you cook it just before you need it, and stir it into the hot sauce just before serving.

Rice

*1 cup Basmati or other long grain rice
2 tsp oil or butter
½ tsp salt
2¼ cups hot water*

1. Put all the ingredients into a microwave dish and microwave, covered, on Full power for 12 minutes.
2. Leave to stand for 5-10 minutes. During this time the rice will soak up the rest of the water and finish cooking.
3. Fluff up with a fork. The rice doesn't need draining and never burns on the bottom.
4. Reheat if necessary.

Note: If you find the rice boiling over, leave the lid ajar or add boiling water and cook at Medium (50% power) for 15 minutes or Defrost (30% power) for longer — about 20 minutes.

Stir-Fried Green Vegetables

I like a mixture of green vegetables cooked this way, but you can choose any vegetable you like. Serve them tender-crisp.

For 2-3 servings:

*1½ Tbsp oil
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
300g prepared vegetables (e.g. zucchini, green peppers, celery, pea pods, etc)
1 tsp cornflour
½ tsp instant chicken stock
¼ tsp salt
2 tsp brown sugar
1 Tbsp dry sherry
1 tsp light soya sauce*

1. Prepare green vegetables. Slice diagonally or into evenly thin slices.
2. In a covered microwave dish cook the garlic in the oil on Full power for 1-2 minutes.
3. Add the vegetables and cook 2 minutes.
4. While the vegetables cook, mix together the remaining ingredients.
5. Stir into the hot vegetables and cook 1 minute longer so vegetables are lightly coated with the glaze.

Iced Banana Cake

Banana cake is a favourite with most. I sometimes top it with cream cheese icing or lemon butter icing. This time I have chosen any easy chocolate icing.

125g butter, melted
1 cup brown sugar
1 Tbsp wine vinegar
2 eggs
2-3 very ripe bananas, mashed
1 cup wholemeal flour
¾ cup flour
1 tsp baking soda
¼ cup milk

1. In a fairly large mixing bowl, melt the butter on Full power for 1 ½ minutes.
2. Add sugar, vinegar and eggs, then beat with a fork or rotary beater until well mixed.
3. Stir in the mashed bananas.
4. Sprinkle the wholemeal flour over the surface.
5. Add the flour and baking soda, sifted together, and the milk.
6. Fold everything together, using a rubber scraper.
7. Turn into a baking paper or Teflon lined 20cm square pan or ring pan.
8. Microwave on Medium-high (70% power) for 12 minutes, or until centre is firm.

Notes: Your cake is done when you start to smell it; when the surface springs back; when you can't see uncooked dough and when it is starting to come away from the sides of the pan. As an extra precaution with soft cakes, use a thin film of non-stick spray. A paper towel on top of the cake pan means more even rising and no sticky uncooked cake on top.

Chocolate Sour Cream Icing

½ cup Chocolate Bits
¼ cup crème fraîche or sour cream

1. Microwave the chocolate on Full power for 1 ½-2 minutes or until melted.
2. Stir in the crème fraîche or sour cream.
3. Spread on the cold cake and refrigerate until the icing has set, if you want it firm.

Alternative Icings

Cream Cheese Icing

2 Tbsp cream cheese
1 Tbsp butter
1 tsp vanilla
1½ cups sifted icing sugar

1. Put cream cheese, butter and vanilla in a medium-sized bowl. Microwave on Full power 20-30 seconds until cream cheese and butter are very soft.
2. Add icing sugar and mix with a knife until smooth and creamy.
3. Add a little milk or icing sugar if mixture is too thick or thin. Spread on slightly warm cake.

Lemon Butter Icing

1 Tbsp butter
1½ Tbsp lemon juice
½ tsp finely grated lemon rind (optional)
1½ cups sifted icing sugar

1. Put butter, lemon juice and rind in a medium-sized bowl. Microwave on Full power for 20 seconds or until butter is soft.
2. Add icing sugar and mix with a knife until smooth and creamy. Spread on slightly warm cake.

Roast Pork Loin — Celebration Dinner

This is a menu which I find very popular for a special-occasion dinner at any time of the year. I usually make it to serve groups of 4 or 6 people, but you can easily increase, or decrease, the amounts. (Remember to alter the cooking times accordingly.)

I sit down beforehand and work out at what precise time I should put the different foods on to cook and to reheat. I know, then, that I can leave the food untended in between times.

When I make this meal in the summer, I always enjoy the fact that the kitchen does not heat up as it would if I cooked the pork roast in the regular oven.

For this menu, I always cook the beans on my cook-top — partly because the microwave oven is being fully utilised with other foods, and partly because I don't think that green beans microwave very well.

When I make the Prune and Apple Sauce (or another fruity sauce) I usually reconstitute fruit leather that I have made at some earlier time. Of course, it is possible to make a similar sauce using fresh fruit, but the convenience and speed of sauce made from the dehydrated fruit always impresses me. The time spent cleaning up dishes is always much shorter when a microwave oven is used. In this menu, there will be no messy roasting pan to worry about, and several of the foods may be served from the dishes they are cooked in.

(Take care that you do not use dishes with a metallic decoration, as these are likely to cause arcing and sparking, which is bad for your microwave oven and also for the look of the decoration.)

ROAST PORK LOIN — CELEBRATION DINNER

Stuffed Loin of Pork
with
Prune and Apple Sauce

Baked Potatoes

Red Cabbage

Green Beans

Ice Cream
with
Spiced Fruity Sauce

Note: Trim Pork loin roasts are pre-trimmed to remove outer layers of fat and skin, which means they are not coated with the skin that forms crackling. If you like crackling, ask your butcher for a sheet of skin with 5mm or less fat under it. Make sure he scores it well. Some people cook crackling in a microwave oven, but I prefer it cooked under the grill in a large piece, then cut up into small pieces before serving time.

Plan of Attack

1. Prepare the Spiced Fruity Sauce, to serve with the ice cream, first. It should be left to stand for an hour or more after cooking so the fruit can plump up nicely. If you intend serving it hot, it can be reheated before serving.
2. While the sauce cooks, prepare and cook the onion for the pork stuffing. Blanch the spinach leaves for the stuffing also.
3. Prepare the red cabbage and put into cook while you stuff the meat and get it ready to cook. The meat takes nearly an hour to cook in the microwave oven.
4. While the pork cooks, scrub the potatoes ready for baking.
5. The potatoes should be cooked allowing 3 minutes per potato plus standing time, so they should be put into the oven towards the end of the standing time for the pork.
6. Prepare and cook the beans on the cook-top.
7. Prepare the Prune and Apple Sauce, using the drained meat cooking liquid.

Note: An alternative to this work plan is to prepare the Spiced Fruity Sauce, the Red Cabbage and the Prune and Apple Sauce earlier, especially if you like to get preparation out of the way, and reheat before serving. Add water or wine instead of the meat liquid to the Prune and Apple Sauce.



Stuffed Loin of Pork

The tender juicy roast of lean pork is stuffed with a colourful and well flavoured mixture making it suitable to serve for a special family occasion. Order a 1.5kg loin of Trim Pork. Depending on how long you cook it and the size of the servings, it will make six or more servings.

6 servings:

*1.5kg loin Trim Pork
mixed mustard*

Stuffing:

*1 onion, finely chopped
2 tsp butter
a small can of pimentos, slices of tamarillo,
fresh cherries or soaked dried apricots
spinach leaves
fresh basil leaves*

1. Cook the onion and butter in a covered dish on Full power for 4-5 minutes, until tender.
2. Open out Trim Pork and cut a pocket in the large muscle. Brush mustard over the pork. Spread the onion evenly down the pocket.
3. For the next layer use either a small can of drained pimentos, or slices of tamarillo, fresh cherries or soaked dried apricots.
4. Blanch spinach leaves briefly in a little water in a loosely tied oven bag, or covered microwave dish. Spread spinach leaves over meat for colour and fresh basil leaves for flavour.
5. Roll up pork, starting with the leanest, most tender section inside. Run small skewers or strong toothpicks down the join and criss-cross strong string to hold it in place.
6. If desired, score the outside of the meat.
7. Rub with a coating of 1 Tbsp dry mustard mixed with 2-3 tsp dark soya sauce and a sprinkling of paprika, if desired.

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8. Put in a ridged dish, cover with a lid or plastic film, or put in an oven bag that is loosely closed. Place dish, elevated 2-3cm, in microwave oven.
9. Cook at 40% power for 17 minutes per 500g for medium well done. (You may like it cooked less than this — say 16 minutes per 500g. If you allow 20 minutes per 500g it may be a bit overcooked.)
10. Leave roast to stand, covered, for at least 30 minutes after cooking.

Crackling

I prefer to cook crackling under the grill. The sheet of pork skin should have 5mm or less fat on its under-surface. Make sure that the whole surface is scored with lines about 5mm apart.

1. Sprinkle the surface with salt, and rub it into the cuts. Next, rub oil evenly over the whole surface.
2. Lay the crackling on a rack or a flat pan. You can cut it into strips, about 5-6cm wide, if this suits you. Tuck the ends under the rungs of the rack, so they do not curl up as they cook.
3. Grill crackling 10cm from the heat, for about 10 minutes, until it bubbles and turns golden brown. (Take care it does not burn.) Turn and grill another 10 minutes on the underside.

Gravy

Drain off from roast the liquid which should have a good flavour and colour. Thicken it with a small amount of cornflour paste.

Prune and Apple Sauce

I like to make a fruit purée from dried fruit. I dry raw or cooked puréed fruit in a dehydrator for about 10 hours or until it is flexible. The fruit leathers can be reconstituted in the microwave oven by breaking into small pieces.

*fruit leather (made with 1 cup cooked apple and
½ cup cooked prunes)
1 cup water
pork cooking liquid
dash of sherry (optional)
½ tsp sugar
1 tsp butter*

1. Break leather into small pieces, add water and microwave on Full power for 3-4 minutes.
2. To the thick purée add some of the drained meat cooking liquid and stir.
3. Serve with the pork as is, or add sherry, sugar and butter if desired.

Variation: If you don't have fruit leather to make the sauce, replace with 1 cup of puréed cooked apples and ½ cup of cooked prunes.

Baked Potatoes

1. Scrub large potatoes and prick each potato 4-6 times.
2. Arrange in a circle on the oven turntable and cook at Full power, allowing 3 minutes per potato.

- 1 small potato (100g) — 3 minutes
- 2 medium potatoes (300g) — 7-8 minutes
- 3 medium potatoes (400g) — 10 minutes
- 4 large potatoes (600-800g) — 12-14 minutes

Turn the potatoes over half way through their estimated cooking time.

3. At the end of the cooking time, potatoes should feel softish, but not completely cooked — they continue cooking during the standing time.
4. Mark a cross with a fork or knife. Press down towards the centre, so the cross opens out. Top with butter, sour cream, yoghurt, crème fraîche or grated cheese and garnish with herbs and/or paprika to serve.

Red Cabbage

4 servings:

- 250g shredded red cabbage
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 apple, sliced
- 2 Tbsp wine vinegar
- 2 tsp butter
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar

1. Combine red cabbage, onion, apple, wine vinegar and butter in a covered microwave dish.
2. Microwave on Full power for 10-15 minutes until tender.
3. Leave to stand for 5 minutes then stir in the salt and brown sugar.

Variation: By adding a little cornflour paste after it's cooked, you can thicken and glaze the red cabbage.

Green Beans

To cook in the microwave, add ½ cup of water to 500g sliced beans. Cook on Full power for 8-15 minutes depending on the age of the beans.

Because the microwave is used to cook everything else for this menu, I prefer to cook the beans with a little garlic, butter and water in a covered saucepan on the stove. My personal opinion is that beans aren't as good microwaved as they are cooked this way.

Spiced Fruity Sauce

This is a simplified version of a Christmas Sauce I make. It can be served hot in water and at room temperature in summer. Spoon it over ice cream and top with a wafer. Allowing the sauce to stand for an hour or so gives the fruit time to plump up.

- 1 cup mixed dried fruit
- 1 Tbsp cornflour
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- 1 cup water
- 1 Tbsp wine vinegar
- 1 tsp butter
- 1-2 Tbsp concentrated orange juice
- rum (optional)

1. In a covered microwave dish measure the dried fruit and the next eight ingredients.
2. Cook on Full power for 8 minutes or until the fruit is plump.
3. Stir in the orange juice and a dash of rum, if desired.
4. Leave to stand for an hour or so if you can.
5. Serve, rewarmed slightly, over ice cream, with pieces of fruit, or in brandy snap baskets.

Softening Ice Cream

Containers of ice cream which have been stored in a freezer may freeze very hard, so the ice cream is too hard to scoop easily. Loosen top of a (2 litre) container, and microwave on Medium (50% power) for 45-60 seconds, depending on hardness.

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